



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.

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



“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.

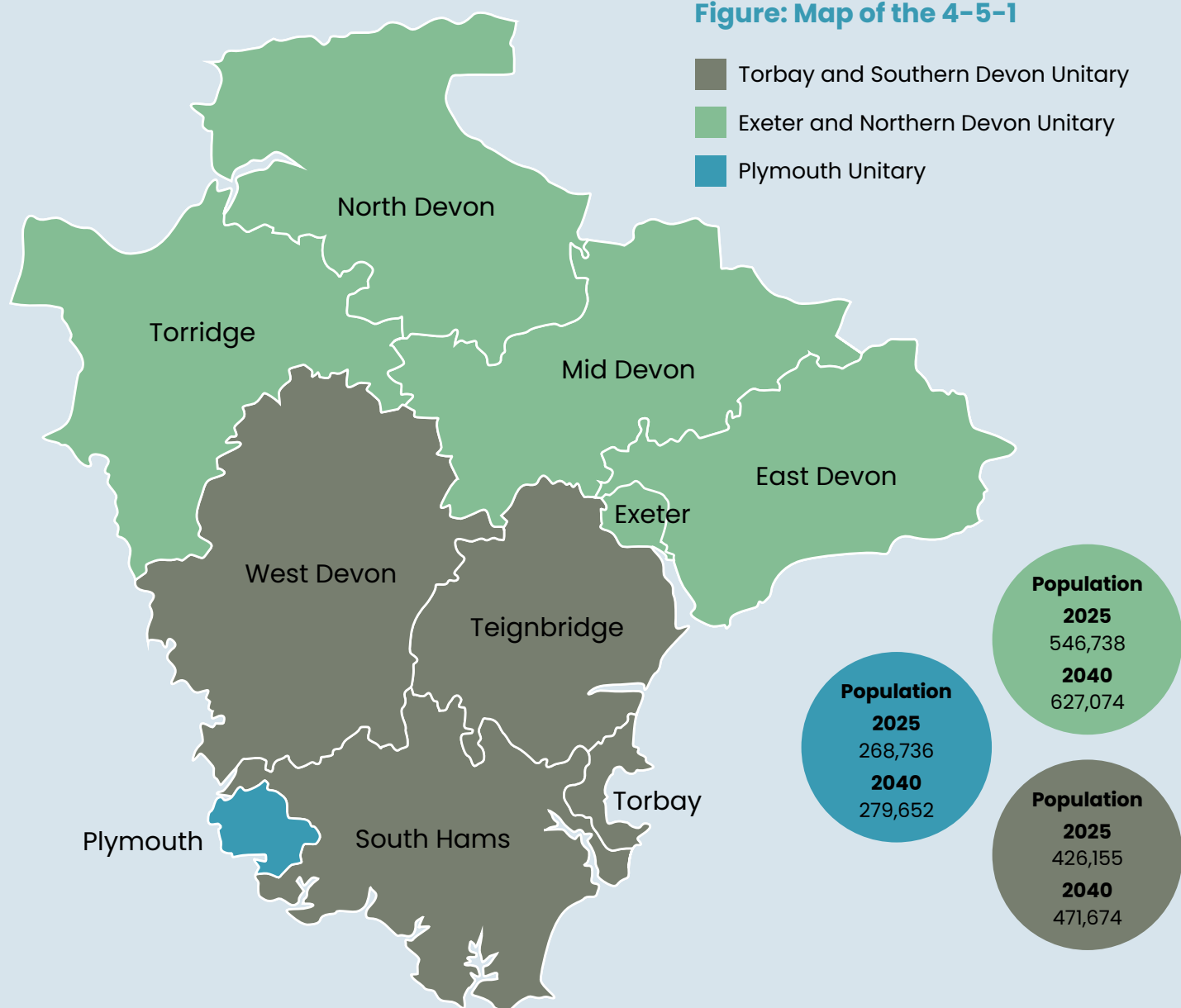
Our proposal

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



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

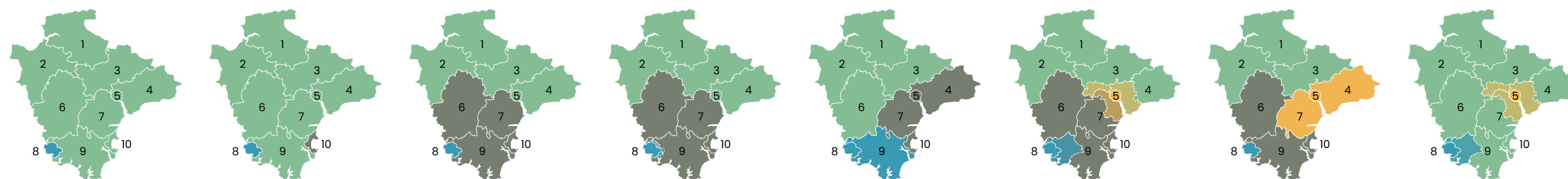
Devon's scale, diversity, and complexity demanded a rigorous, evidence-led approach to reorganisation. Over the past year, councils across Devon have collaborated to evaluate eight potential models for local government reform. Our shared ambition was clear: find a solution that delivers better outcomes,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

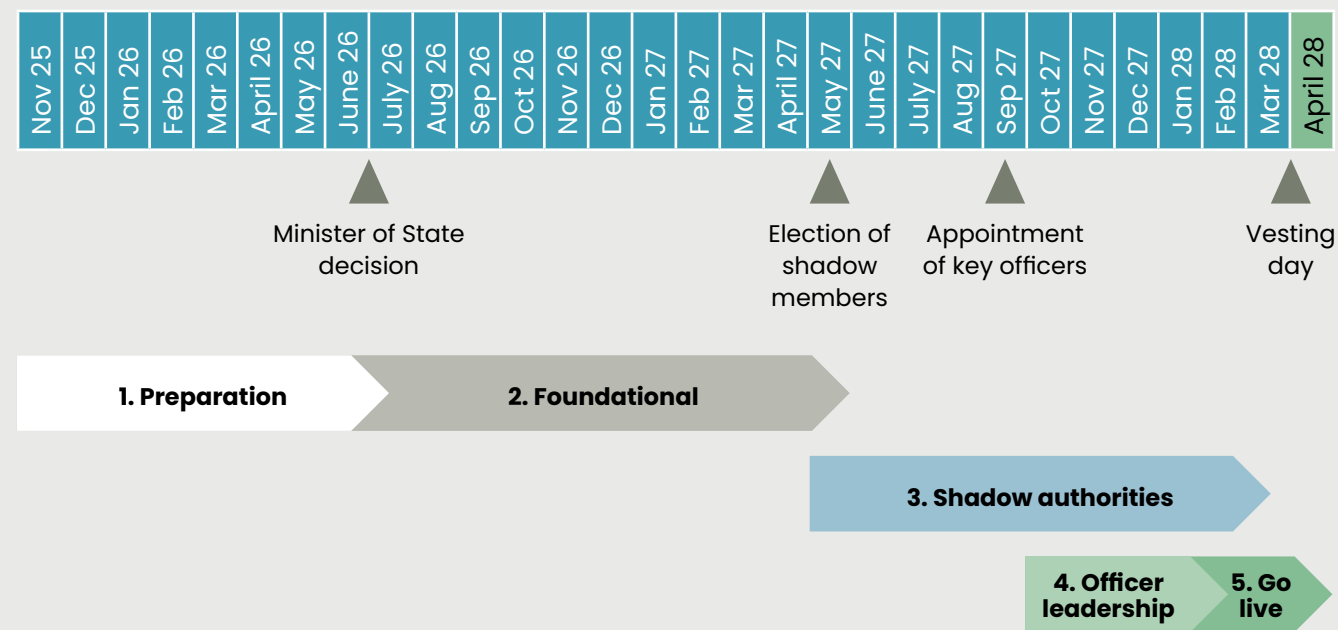


Figure: Implementation phases with key milestones

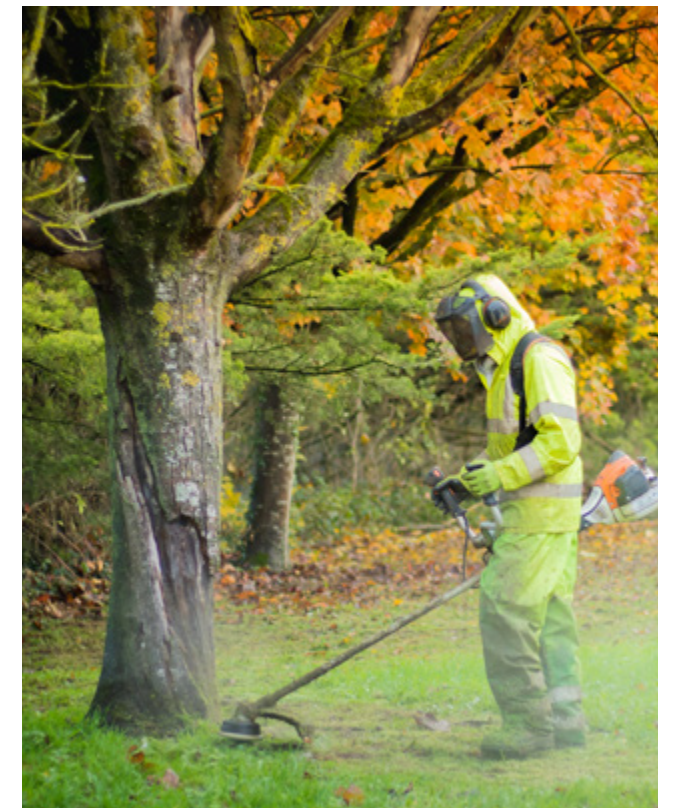
Implementation

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.



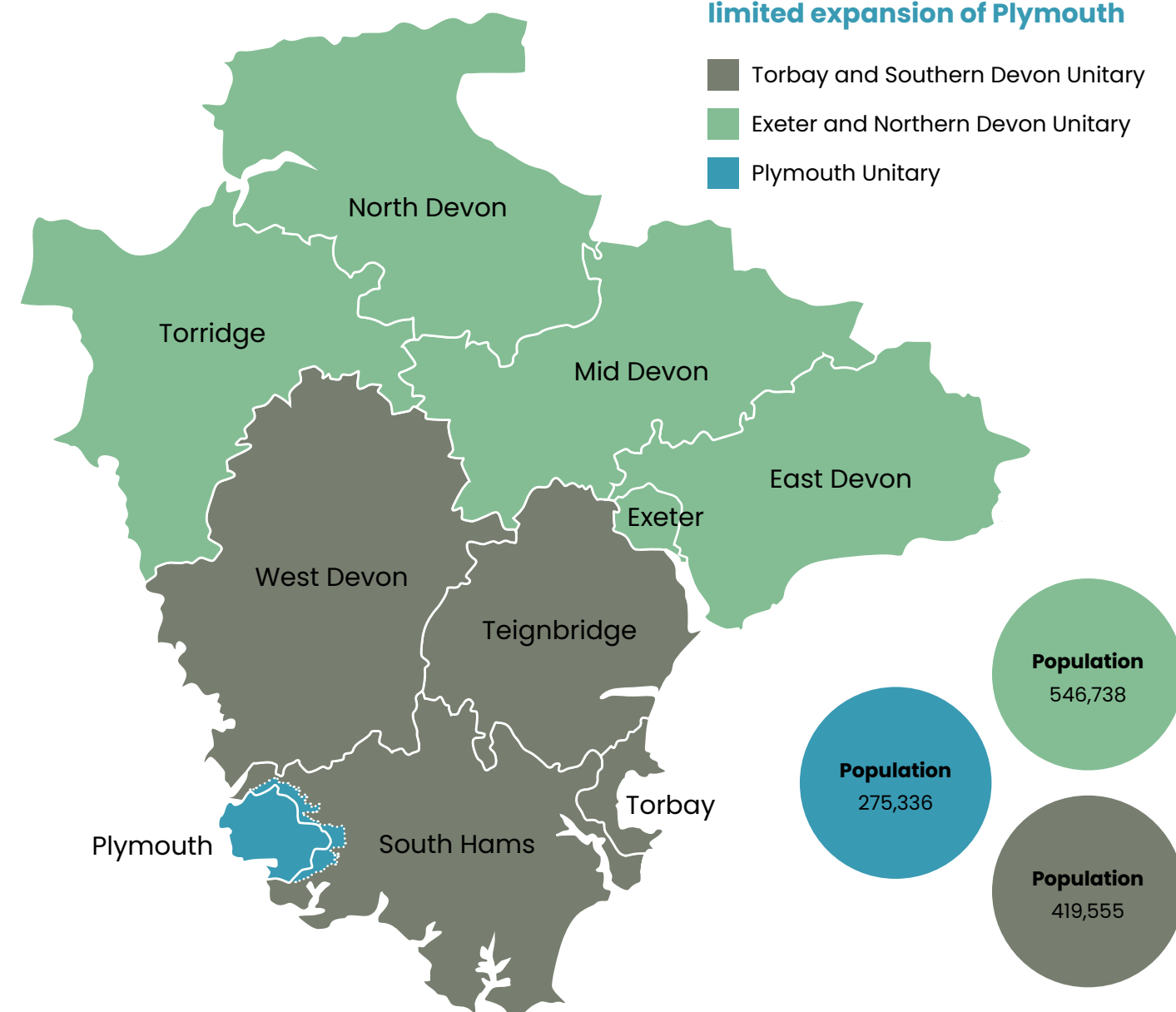
A central feature of the 4-5-1+ proposal is its respect for the Dartmoor National Park boundary. By avoiding expansion across this protected area, our model maintains clarity in planning responsibilities, prevents administrative complexity, and safeguards the park's environmental and cultural qualities.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

www.reimaginingdevon.org



Section 1: Vision and ambition

We are embracing reorganisation as a unique opportunity to better serve communities and unlock the county's full potential. Central to our collective ambition is a commitment to transformation; delivering localised, high-performing services, focussing on inclusive economic growth, and cultivating integrated public services that reflect the needs and aspirations of Devon's residents.

4-5-1 is not simply a structural change, but a catalyst for lasting improvement and resilience, ensuring that every part of Devon is empowered to thrive.

We are highly optimistic about the opportunity presented through reorganisation in Devon; a moment to realign and reconfigure local government so it truly reflects the needs, strengths, and ambitions of every community. Our vision is bold, optimistic, and rooted in the belief that Devon can, and will, do better for its people.

“This is Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better; a county united by purpose, driven by resident requirements, and ready to unlock its full potential. ”

At the heart of our approach is a commitment to reflecting what matters most to our communities, grounding every decision we make in a shared sense of purpose and collective ambition.

Our 4-5-1 model is not just a structural change which offers the 'easiest' route to reorganisation consolidating services within existing upper-tier footprints; it is a catalyst for transformation that prioritises outcomes and building resilient authorities. It is about believing in better public services, stronger communities, consolidating services within existing upper-tier footprints, resulting in a more prosperous, inclusive future for all. We are determined to move beyond the limitations of the current two-tier system, embracing a new era where local government is agile, responsive, and ambitious.

Longmarsh, Totnes, South Hams



Our ambition is to deliver:

1. Localised, high-performing services

Our model for Devon's local government reorganisation places local knowledge and accountability at the forefront, realigning services around authentic communities and established functional relationships. By dividing Devon into two new unitaries (Northern and Southern) while retaining the City of Plymouth as a standalone authority, we ensure that service delivery is closely attuned to the lived realities of residents. This approach draws on in-depth understanding of travel-to-work flows, shopping habits, hospital catchments, and education provision, ensuring that services are not only efficient but also relevant to the people they serve. We further harness the strengths of voluntary and community providers, integrating their expertise to maintain and scale high standards of district service delivery across the new unitaries. Our 4-5-1 model enables smarter, faster, and more integrated support, preserving local identity and responsiveness, and avoiding the dilution of service quality that can result from over-centralisation.

2. A comprehensive Devon solution

We know that bigger is not always better when it comes to delivering services and effectively managing costs, but that if councils are too small, they become unviable. Our proposal is designed to deliver for all of Devon—urban, rural, and coastal—by balancing the need for local responsiveness with the scale required for efficiency and resilience. Our model reflects not only natural communities but also the functional markets and historic contexts that shape life in Devon, acknowledging patterns such as travel and service use, and ensuring that local identity and tradition are embedded in decision-making. We are committed to achieving broad parity in resource allocation, ensuring that key metrics such as resources per head and social care provision are balanced across areas. This approach guarantees that no community is left behind, and all parts of Devon can thrive within organisations whose cultures and leadership are relevant to their localities, while also fostering growth, innovation, and regional influence.



3. Quality housing for communities

Our approach will position the future councils to tackle the Devon housing crisis with immediacy and impact. In the northern unitary, it brings together all current stock-retaining authorities and combines them under one footprint, unlocking economies of scale in terms of maintenance, retrofit and new delivery, alongside management efficiency in the Housing Revenue Account. In the southern unitary, it clusters together the councils with expertise of working with and through the network of registered providers, in the context of Dartmoor and a range of other landscape and environmental designations. Both councils will be well-placed to build on the work of the recent Devon Housing Commission, delivering quality housing for their communities.

4. Transformative and integrated public services

Reorganisation acts as a catalyst to fundamentally reconfigure how public services operate together. Our 4-5-1 model is designed for integration, breaking down silos and driving digital transformation while aligning with wider government priorities and public sector reforms. By embedding place-based prevention and enabling tailored, collaborative service delivery, our model supports modernisation and effective cross-sector partnerships. Through this integrated approach, we unlock significant improvements in service quality and efficiency, supporting better outcomes for communities and aligning with the ambitions of wider reforms such as the NHS and Integrated Care Systems.

5. Economic growth and identity

Our model strategically aligns governance with Devon's economic assets, growth corridors, and both regional and sub-regional centres. This ensure that economic growth is inclusive, place based and aligns with the priorities and opportunities set out in the government's Industrial Strategy. By linking together economic resources, such as Exeter's education and innovation assets with marine, clean energy, and agri-food sectors in surrounding rural and coast areas, our approach drives the county's unique inward investment offer, further unlocking significant opportunities for growth. Place-based growth planning underpins our vision, connecting skills, innovation, and business support across the county and ensuring that growth and opportunity are not concentrated solely in major urban centres, but are spread evenly to sub-regional hubs such as Barnstaple and beyond. This integrated strategy secures infrastructure funding, attracts inward investment, and creates sustainable pathways for job creation and generates inclusive prosperity.

6. Natural capital and sustainable development

We are committed to shaping councils around Devon's real communities and landscapes, with boundaries that reflect national parks and national landscapes. This approach provides a robust platform for protecting the natural environment while enabling sustainable rural economic growth, particularly in agri-tech, food production, and green energy. Our model demonstrates a clear commitment to environmental sustainability and the protection of natural assets enhancing biodiversity and protecting nature, while supporting the transition to a low carbon economy. By aligning governance with natural assets, we avoid the risks of misalignment inherent in other models and ensure that environmental priorities are fully embedded in decision-making.

7. Devolution and voice

The establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority will empower Devon to speak with a unified and influential voice at both regional and national levels. All eleven councils in Devon have recently written to government indicating support for advancing toward a full Mayoral Strategic Authority, initially encompassing Devon and Torbay, with a long-term goal of incorporating Cornwall into the peninsula. This structure delivers clear and credible representation in national policymaking while enhancing community involvement and accountability on a regional scale. The Mayoral Strategic Authority model supports policy coherence and strategic coordination across urban, rural, and coastal areas, empowering local leaders to shape policy and investment according to the distinct needs and ambitions of their communities. By pooling expertise and fostering collaboration across sectors, the authority will drive inclusive growth and ensure that all localities benefit from shared economic, social, and environmental progress.

8. Balanced scale and locality

Our polycentric approach ensures that each proposed unitary authority is of sufficient scale to achieve efficiencies, withstand financial shocks, and deliver resilient, high-quality services, while remaining agile and locally focused. We recognise the importance of local service centres, especially as essential hubs for surrounding rural areas, and support the role of sub-regional centres alongside main urban areas. This structure prevents dominance by any single authority, guarantees that no area is left behind, and aligns with government guidance on population, geography, and community identity. By balancing scale and locality, we avoid the inefficiencies and loss of accountability associated with overly centralised or fragmented arrangements.

9. Financial sustainability and quick payback

We know that bigger is not always better when it comes to service delivery and managing costs effectively, but that if councils are too small, they become unviable.

Our model is designed for robust financial sustainability, delivering significant ongoing savings and a quick return on investment, with a payback period of under three years in the base case. We achieve broad parity between constituent parts, ensuring that resources are allocated equitably and that essential needs are met across all communities. Larger unitaries, grounded in local realities, are better positioned to attract investment, manage risk, and deliver value for money. Our financial case is transparent and evidence-led, supported by independent financial modelling, robust benchmarking, and a clear path to long-term sustainability.

10. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

We embed subsidiarity and participatory governance at the heart of our model through the creation of neighbourhood area committees and local community networks. Decision-making is devolved to the closest possible level, empowering neighbourhoods to shape and co-design services and governance that are tailored to their needs. Working in tandem to design with the community and their locally elected town and parish representatives and councils. This approach strengthens local democracy through clear accountability and balanced representation, ensuring that local voices are heard and acted upon. By promoting active engagement and leveraging community expertise, our model ensures that governance remains grounded in the lived experiences and aspirations of Devon's diverse communities.

Our 4-5-1 model stands out as the most effective vehicle for delivering our **'Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better'** vision, as it embodies and advances the key themes highlighted above. By aligning local governance with the realities of Devon's communities, landscapes, and economic assets, our model ensures that the county's ambitions for sustainable growth, robust local democracy, and balanced service delivery are realised. Critically, our 4-5-1 model has scored impressively across each of the government's criteria, ranging from financial sustainability and efficiency to local accountability, representation, and community empowerment, which are explored in further detail below. This evidence-led approach positions Devon to achieve transformative change and ongoing improvement, underpinned by a strong foundation of partnership, inclusion, and innovation.



Bideford Pannier Market, Torridge

Section 2: Approach

This section outlines the comprehensive, evidence-based process undertaken by the majority of Devon’s councils to evaluate reorganisation options for the future, including collaborative analysis, rigorous options appraisal, and stakeholder engagement. Our approach demonstrates how financial sustainability, place-based service delivery, and robust governance informed the proposal for a new, future-ready unitary model for Devon.

We take pride in our place, both now and for the future, which is why it was of paramount importance to our councils to develop and undertake a detailed, comprehensive and evidence-led process to identify the best option for reorganisation in Devon. Throughout the past 11 months, we have established a clear timeline and decision-making process, allowing us to be led by the data, through the lens of place and community in order to understand what is best for the people of Devon by consulting with our residents, partners, businesses, as well as many more of our key stakeholder groups.

On the following pages we explain the various stages undertaken to get us to a decision point on the final best option for reorganisation in Devon. This is split into the following stages:

Stage	Key Activities
Interim Phase	Combined collaborative analysis, evidence-led evaluation, and financial modelling to identify a balanced and sustainable governance model that responds to Devon’s unique needs and future ambitions
Ongoing Collaboration and Strategic Planning	Engaged in collaborative planning, established programme management, and received government feedback, leading to the initiation of public consultations and regular collaboration and discovery meetings.
Options Appraisal	Systematically evaluated eight reorganisation models for Devon using a blend of quantitative data and qualitative place-based criteria, ensuring robust stakeholder involvement and clear alignment with government priorities.
Case Development	Synthesising evidence, iterative reviews with senior officers and political leads, and ensuring compliance with statutory requirements.

Interim Phase (December–March 2025)

In December 2024, The UK Government published its English Devolution White Paper, “Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth,” which set out the intention to move to single-tier unitary authorities in areas with a two-tier system (county and district councils), like Devon.

In January, a joint statement was issued by all Devon district leaders including Exeter City Council and was submitted to government. This highlighted support for genuine devolution of powers, but opposition to the prospect of a single large unitary and to any delay to the County Council elections scheduled for May. A series of Extraordinary Full Council meetings were then held to consider initial responses to the White Paper and the associated criteria for local government reorganisation. The Devon Districts Forum (covering the eight district councils in Devon) considered the collective response to the White Paper and how proposals for local government reorganisation could progress. This meeting was attended by the national Local Government Association (LGA) Chair.



On February 3, a meeting was held where all of the Devon authorities gathered to discuss the current process and timelines for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution. This meeting was facilitated by the LGA and was crucial in understanding what these changes would mean for Devon, focusing on collective working and planning for the future. Shortly after, the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (CCA) was officially formed, marking a significant step in the devolution process. On the same day, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution issued a statutory invitation to all two-tier council areas, including Devon’s councils (Devon County Council, the eight district councils, and the existing unitary authorities of Plymouth and Torbay), to submit interim proposals for new unitary structures by March 21, 2025. It was also confirmed that the request to postpone local elections for the county council scheduled for May 2025 had been rejected. Throughout February, ongoing discussions and negotiations took place at both officer and political levels to consider the best possible response to the government’s criteria for LGR and the form that the interim proposal should take. It became clear that Exeter City Council favoured a standalone Exeter unitary model, while a group comprising the remaining seven districts and Torbay Council began to develop the proposals for our 4-5-1 model, a proposal better aligned to the government guidance and assessment criteria.

In March, the Interim Plan was jointly submitted by leaders of seven of the Devon district councils (East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council, North Devon Council, South Hams District Council, Teignbridge District Council, Torridge District Council, and West Devon Borough Council). This group came together in response to the UK Government’s invitation to submit proposals for a single tier of local government, as part of the English Devolution White Paper. While Torbay Council was part of the development of the 4-5-1 Interim Plan, it was also exploring a range of options independently. Additionally, Exeter City Council, Devon County Council, North Devon District Council and Plymouth City Council submitted a range of proposals.



In developing the Interim Plan, we undertook a structured and collaborative approach to assess the future governance options for Devon. Recognising the scale and complexity of the county, home to over 1.25 million residents across 6,500 km², we knew that any reorganisation must strike a careful balance between population size, service efficiency, and local identity.

We began by grounding our assessment in the two key principles outlined by the Minister of State: that proposals should use existing district areas as building blocks, and that new councils should aim for populations of around 500,000. These principles initially shaped our design framework and helped us define what “credible and sustainable” would look like for Devon.

Over the three months following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper, we explored five main options covering different

areas of Devon (as set out below). However, we focused our assessment on Options 1 and 2, which adhered to existing local government boundaries, aligning with government preference. Options 3 to 5, which involved significant boundary changes, were excluded from this stage of analysis due to their complexity, potential disruption, and failure to comply with the Minister of State’s clearly stated principles.

We carefully evaluated the feasibility of a single unitary authority for Devon and concluded that it would be too large to deliver effective, efficient services while retaining a sense of place. Devon’s population far exceeds the upper guidance threshold of 700,000–800,000 for a single unitary, and its geographic diversity, from coastal towns and deeply rural areas to concentrated urban areas including the city of Exeter, demands a more nuanced and tailored solution.

Figure: Options considered in the Interim Plan

1. A single unitary council covering the Devon County Council and Torbay areas	Without boundary changes
2. Two unitary councils covering the Devon County Council and Torbay areas	
3. An expanded Plymouth City unitary	With boundary changes
4. An expanded Torbay unitary	
5. A new Exeter City unitary	



Our preferred option at that stage emerged as a three-unitary model:

- one for Southern Devon (South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay, and West Devon);
- one for Northern Devon (East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge);
- Plymouth retaining its existing unitary status.

This configuration reflects natural travel-to-work areas, strategic transport corridors, and existing community ties. It also enables the creation of two balanced authorities, each with populations close to 500,000, and with similar shares of social care needs and council tax income per head. This proposal balanced the government's stated intent to retain existing authority boundaries, with the changes that were sought by government to create new unitary councils across two-tier areas, which would unlock devolution. Plymouth as a current unitary council of considerable size was retained, with the two new proposed unitary councils meeting all government criteria. The scale of Devon is such that these two new authorities would be among the largest in the country by area. The Northern Devon authority would immediately become the largest council geographically in the South West, being bigger than Cornwall, and the fourth largest in the country. It is this scale that partly explains, evidences and justifies why alternative proposals around a single new authority option were untenable, in addition to failing to adhere to government guidance.

To support our interim assessment, **we commissioned independent financial modelling from Pixel Financial. This analysis confirmed that both the proposed new authorities would be financially sustainable, with evenly distributed resources per capita and strong potential for future revenue growth.** We also considered the risks of further costs associated with realigning services and ensured that our proposals would avoid the inefficiencies associated with splitting services across too many small units. Our proposal achieves a better balance of authorities across Devon. Today's local authority structure sees seven districts alongside three upper-tier authorities.

Our proposal retains a 3-authority model in Devon, but with a far better balance between them. This inherently creates a more balanced, sustainable position, and equips the councils well for working with devolved power structures in the future and importantly, it reconfigures key services to maximise efficiency and outcomes, without having to create more; upper-tier councils; we will have 3 more effective, balanced, sustainable and efficient authorities in future.

Beyond financial metrics, we assessed operational synergies, growth metrics, strategic infrastructure alignment, and the ability of each proposed authority to support integrated service delivery. We looked at

existing shared service arrangements (in particular the fully shared workforce and integrated systems between South Hams and West Devon councils), NHS locality partnerships, and educational institutions to ensure that our proposals would enhance, not disrupt current systems.

Ultimately, our initial options assessment was guided by a commitment to place-based governance, financial resilience, and service transformation. During the interim phase, the three-unitary model offered the best fit for Devon's geography, economy, and communities, and provides a strong foundation for future devolution and public service reform.





Ongoing Collaboration and Strategic Planning (April–July 2025)

Throughout the spring, there was ongoing engagement between our councils to consider programme management arrangements and the resources required to support the development of the full proposal by the November deadline. This period was marked by collaborative efforts to ensure that all necessary elements were in place for the successful submission of the proposal.

Following the County Council elections, a significant change in political control occurred, with a coalition between the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party being formed. Shortly after, the Government provided feedback on the interim proposals, requesting the submission of formal, full proposals by the November deadline. This feedback was crucial in guiding the next steps for the councils. A meeting of all Devon chief executives was promptly held to discuss their position in relation to reorganisation prior to a scheduled leaders' meeting. During this time, there was considerable activity to establish the programme and project management arrangements.

A further meeting of all Devon authorities was facilitated by the LGA, with a focus on collaboration and data sharing, essential components for the successful development of proposals. The chief executives' steering group was initiated from members of our seven councils, setting the stage for coordinated efforts moving forward, followed by a meeting involving all members of the two project teams to coordinate activity and discuss work packages at a programme level. This meeting was crucial for aligning efforts and ensuring that all teams were working toward common goals. An information sharing agreement by all 11 Devon councils was completed, which was then followed by Plymouth City Council creating a data room for data to be deposited and accessed. The period concluded with the launch of a public survey across the authorities, aimed at gathering public input and ensuring that the proposals were reflective of the community's needs and preferences.

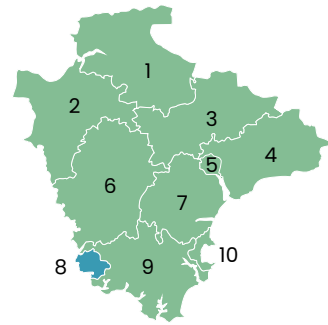
The subsequent phase began with a leaders meeting to consider progress with the development of the 4-5-1 proposals. This meeting was an opportunity to review the work done so far and plan the next steps. A workshop was then held with all project team members to help develop the collective vision for LGR, a key moment for ensuring that all team members were aligned and working toward a shared vision. Regular monthly meetings with the LGA and MHCLG teams commenced in the following weeks.



Bampton, Mid Devon

Options Appraisal (July–October 2025)

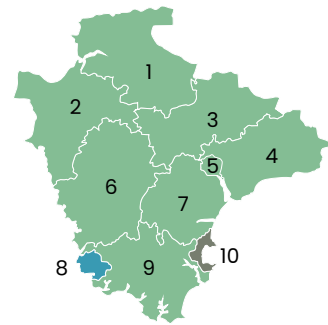
Between July and October 2025, we undertook a comprehensive and collaborative options appraisal process to determine the most appropriate model for local government reorganisation in Devon. This work was grounded in our shared commitment to transparency, evidence-led decision-making, and the delivery of high-quality, sustainable public services. Our approach was designed to meet the government's six criteria for reorganisation and was shaped by extensive engagement with residents, partners, and stakeholders across the county.



Option A: County

Summary of 2 unitary model:

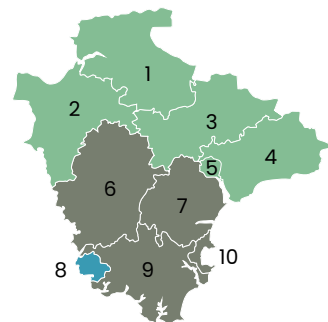
- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon, East Devon, Exeter, West Devon, Teignbridge, South Hams and Torbay (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10)
- Unitary 2: Retain Plymouth unitary authority (8)



Option B: Plymouth / Torbay

Summary of 3 unitary model:

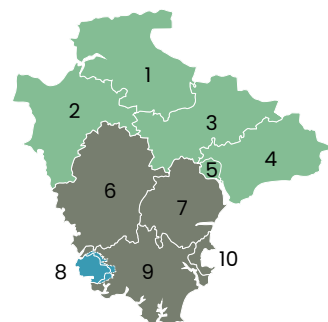
- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon, East Devon, Exeter, West Devon, Teignbridge and South Hams (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9)
- Unitary 2: Retain Plymouth unitary authority (8)
- Unitary 3: Retain Torbay unitary authority (10)



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)

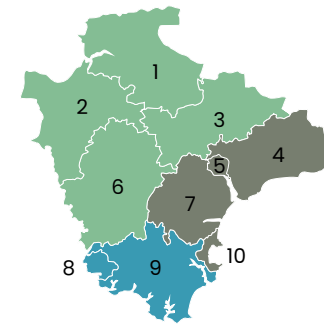


Option C+: 4-5-1+

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))

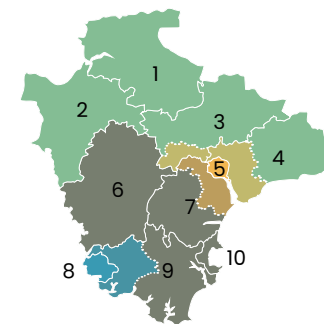
Figure: Options identified for appraisal



Option D: 4-4-2

Summary of 3 unitary model:

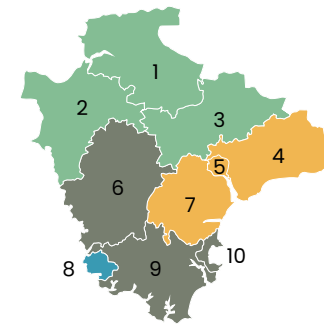
- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon and West Devon (1, 2, 3, 6)
- Unitary 2: A unitary authority including Plymouth and South Hams (8, 9)
- Unitary 3: A unitary authority including East Devon, Exeter, Teignbridge and Torbay (4, 5, 7, 10)



Option E: Exeter / Plymouth+

Summary of 4 unitary model:

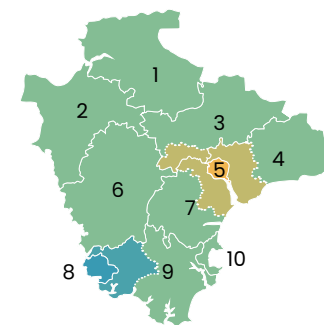
- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon and East Devon (1, 2, 3, 4)
- Unitary 2: A unitary authority including an expanded Plymouth area (8) (+13 parishes in South Hams)
- Unitary 3: A unitary authority including West Devon, Teignbridge, South Hams and Torbay (6, 7,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

Our Structured Evaluation Framework

We developed and applied a robust methodology to assess eight potential reorganisation options. This framework was split into two complementary approaches:

■ Quantitative Assessment (Criteria 1–3):

We used the most recent publicly available datasets, supplemented by shared analysis across Devon's councils, to evaluate each option against a set of defined metrics. These included population size and density, council tax base, financial resilience, service delivery indicators, and geographic coherence. Our aim was to ensure that each proposed unitary configuration could deliver balanced, efficient, and resilient services.

■ Qualitative Assessment (Criteria 4–6):

Recognising that some criteria are less able to be analysed quantitatively, we undertook a place-based qualitative assessment. This involved input from local stakeholders to evaluate factors such as community identity, alignment with NHS and emergency service boundaries, and the capacity for neighbourhood empowerment. We developed draft narratives and ranked each option as high, medium, or low based on its perceived ability to meet these criteria.

Each option was scored using a balance-based ranking system. We calculated the difference between the highest and lowest figures for each metric within a given option, with lower variance indicating greater balance. This approach ensured that no single proposed authority would be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged, and that all residents across Devon would benefit from equitable access to services and opportunities. This focus on balance is to ensure the right outcome and long-term sustainability for the whole of the local government system across Devon.

Our Shortlisting and Filtering Process

Following the initial scoring, we applied a two-stage shortlisting process. In the first stage, we eliminated three options (A, B, and G) that performed poorly across multiple criteria. These options exhibited wide disparities in population, economic indicators, and service delivery metrics, and lacked alignment with local identities and engagement mechanisms.

In the second stage, we applied strategic filters based on Devon's unique geography and governance landscape. These included:

- Ensuring that Plymouth, Exeter, and Torbay were not grouped within the same unitary, to maintain balance and avoid implementation challenges.
- Limiting boundary changes to Plymouth's immediate neighbouring parishes, in line with the Plymouth Policy Area (PPA) in the adopted Joint Local Plan, avoiding disruption to national park areas and preserving rural identities.

This process narrowed our shortlist to three final options: C, C+, and F. Each of these options was then subject to further comparative analysis and scoring to support informed discussion among council leaders and chief executives.



Our Final Selection

After careful deliberation, we agreed that Option C, referred to throughout our proposal as the 4-5-1 model, represents the best way forward for Devon. This model proposes:

- A Southern Devon unitary comprising South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay, and West Devon.
- A Northern Devon unitary comprising East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge.
- Plymouth retained on its existing unitary status.

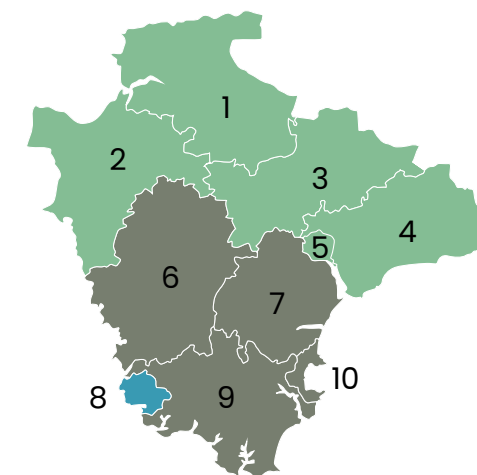
Option C was chosen as it was the highest scoring option of the shortlist that retained existing district and unitary authority boundaries. Whilst Option F was assessed as being more able to meet the criterion of working together to understand and meet local needs, Option C was assessed considerably higher in its ability to meet the financial sustainability criterion outlined by the government. Option C best reflected our intention to build authorities that were both robust, resilient structures and rooted in place and local identity.

Option C+ was also supported by some councillors as a variant of the 4-5-1 model, incorporating modest boundary changes to reflect the Plymouth conurbation. This variant aligns with the Plymouth Policy Area (PPA) (as defined by the Joint Local Plan between Plymouth, South Hams and West Devon) and is documented in full within our appendix.

Our decision was informed by a shared understanding of Devon's scale, diversity, and strategic priorities. We concluded that the 4-5-1 model strikes the right balance between scale and locality, enabling us to deliver efficient services while remaining closely connected to the people and places we serve and represent.

Further detail on our options appraisal process can be found in the appendix.

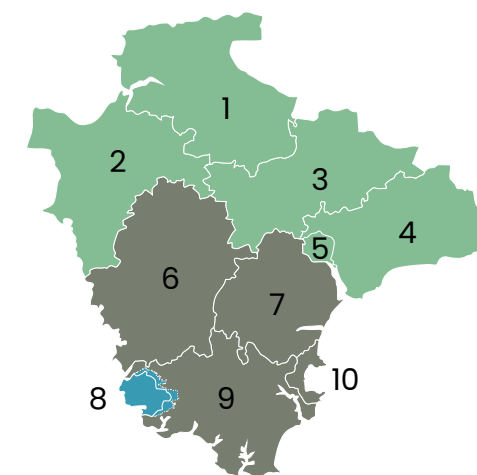
Figure: The options chosen to take forward to a proposal to government



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))

Case Development (September–November 2025)

This phase brought together the activity and evidence collected into the case for change. The process began with the collection and analysis of relevant data and evidence, which was then synthesised to form a coherent and compelling argument for the proposed changes. This synthesis was not a one-time activity but an ongoing process that required continuous refinement and validation with our key stakeholders. We collaborated in the formation of a shared data room and the formation of a Data Task and Finish group to help ensure that common assumptions were utilised.

An iterative review process was implemented to ensure the robustness and credibility of the case. This involved multiple rounds of review and feedback from senior officers, political leads, and service leads. These stakeholders played a crucial role in challenging the evidence and assumptions, ensuring that the case was both comprehensive and persuasive. Their input helped to identify any gaps or weaknesses in the evidence, which were then addressed through further analysis and refinement.



Monitoring officers were engaged throughout this process to ensure compliance with relevant statutory requirements. Their role was to provide oversight and ensure that the case adhered to legal and regulatory standards. This was essential to maintain the integrity and legitimacy of the case, as well as to mitigate any potential legal risks. Governance leads, including monitoring officers, also led early work on democratic representation and proposed governance of the new authorities, in order to ensure that these arrangements were robust and ready for implementation to achieve the government's ambitious timetable for initiating new unitary councils.

Throughout the case development period, financial officers from all of the Devon councils involved in our joint process worked in close partnership to ensure rigour and challenge in the financial case and underpinning assumptions. This collaborative approach was strengthened by the active involvement of chief executives, council leaders, monitoring officers, and statutory officers, who contributed valuable input, feedback, and scrutiny at every stage. All members were kept informed through regular briefings on progress, reinforcing transparency and shared ownership of the process. The chief executive team and senior officers undertook weekly, iterative reviews of the case, providing detailed analysis and constructive feedback to maintain high standards of robustness. Our ethos of collaboration will remain central to future implementation, supporting ongoing scrutiny and improvement as the reorganisation moves forward.

The development of the case was a collaborative effort that involved rigorous analysis, continuous refinement, and underpinned by our ability to fully meet the government criteria and implement the proposal when required.

In the same way finance officers, who have similar statutory duties (as Section 151 officers) in respect of financial probity, worked together with external expertise from Pixel Financial to critically appraise the financial evaluation of the proposals and ensure the financial viability of the proposals is evidence based and robust.

Governance

Within this section we set out the programme governance established following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024 that have helped to shape the development of the 4-5-1 model of local government reorganisation in Devon. It considers the partnership working that has occurred through different groups including the following;

- **Devon Districts Forum** – this includes all eight district councils in Devon together with the Devon Association of Local Councils
- **Team Devon** – this brings together the county and district councils in Devon
- **All Devon authorities** – this includes the county and district councils alongside the two unitaries of Plymouth and Torbay

These meetings have included both leaders and chief executives with specific meetings also including support from the Local Government Association. Underneath this, regular meetings have occurred at both chief executive and S.151 level to discuss key issues and progress specific work themes. Latterly an LGR Programme Leads group has been convened by Plymouth City Council to help coordinate data sharing activity at a more technical level. This followed the creation of a shared data room.

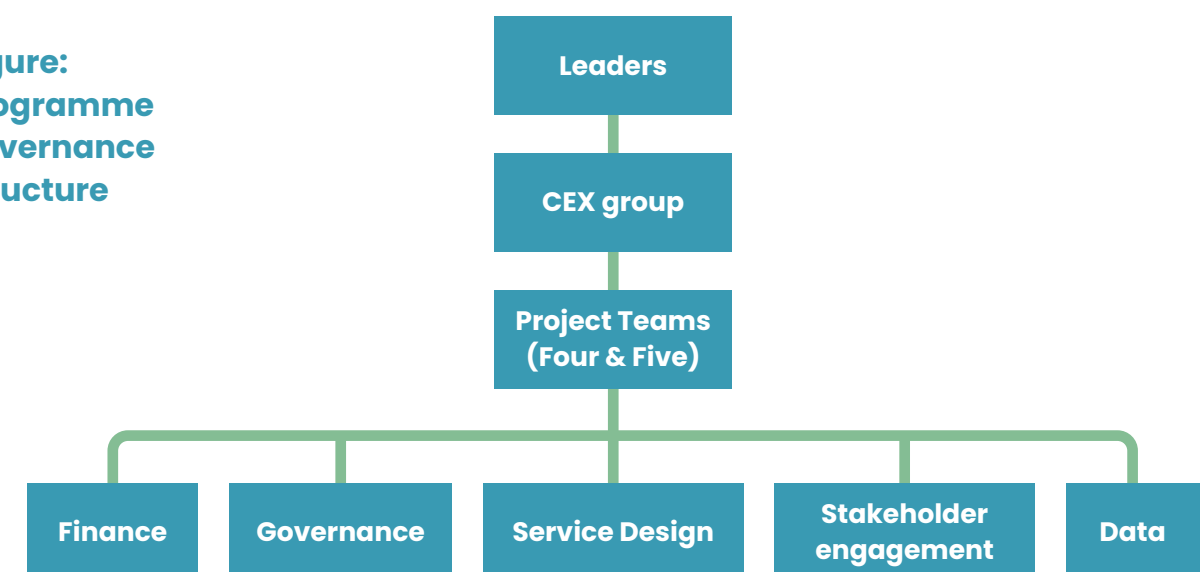
Programme management arrangements were constituted for the 4-5-1 model of local government reorganisation in May. At this point it had become clear that Exeter City Council had opted out from supporting this model and instead were pursuing the establishment of a new Exeter unitary council.

The Programme Initiation Document set out the following governance arrangements;

- **Council Leaders Board** – this was comprised of the leaders or portfolio holders from the seven district councils of Devon and the leader of Torbay Council. The key role was to provide overall strategic direction and oversight for the development of the proposals.
- **Chief Executive Steering Group** – Chief executives from the eight authorities. The role of this group was to oversee the day-to-day progress of the programme, address programme challenges and risks and ensure effective coordination and collaboration between councils and wider stakeholders.

Two project teams, one for the 'four' and one for the 'five', were established, drawing on expertise from across our authorities, alongside establishing an overall programme lead to ensure coordination of activity at a programme level. Five key workstreams were constituted covering finance, governance, data, service design and stakeholder engagement. The overall structure is set out below;

Figure:
Programme
governance
structure





Specialist external support was commissioned across the authorities in relation to financial analysis. Operational workshops were formed with senior officers to focus on strategic design areas such as place and environment; planning, transport and infrastructure; recycling and waste; housing; adults and children's services. Finally, KPMG were appointed to support us in developing our case for change in August. A shared public survey was developed to ensure that comparable analysis could be undertaken across our areas alongside a stakeholder engagement plan.

Torbay Council led the development of the data sharing protocol which was the precursor to the data room being established. Data templates developed at Torbay were also shared across the project teams to enable the consistent collection and submission of data.

The case for change draws on a diverse evidence base including Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) documents and financial statements, service performance dashboards, ONS 2023 and Census 2021 population data and geographic analysis, benchmarking with comparable reorganisations, and shared baseline data sources with Plymouth City Council and Devon County Council.



Engagement with our stakeholders

1. Leaders, Chief Executives, and Partnerships

Engagement has been central to our approach. We are willing partners in the Devon Districts Forum and in meetings of all local authorities across Devon. These forums enabled alignment on key principles, shared concerns, and the co-development of proposals. We also facilitated engagement with wider partnerships, including strategic boards, local MPs, town and parish councils and community stakeholders.

Public engagement included online events with parish and town councils, discussions with the Place Leadership Board in Torbay, where there are no town or parish councils, and initial surveys to gather resident and stakeholder views where over 5,900 responses were received. We are committed to expanding this engagement in the next phase, with structured consultation planned across all sectors.

2. Commissioning Independent Expertise

To ensure our proposals were grounded in robust evidence, we commissioned a range of expert inputs. Pixel Financial provided

independent financial modelling, stress-testing the sustainability of the proposed unitary structures. We also drew on insights from KPMG, the Local Government Association (LGA), as well as wider thematic expertise drawn from across local government.

3. Data Sharing and Common Datasets

Recognising the importance of consistent and transparent data, we committed to establishing a single, comprehensive dataset to underpin all financial and service modelling. We advocated for full data sharing across councils to ensure accuracy and fairness in the final proposals. We have actively supported the establishment of a Data and Task Finish Group to ensure a common approach across the area.

4. Strategic Partnership Engagement

We have actively engaged with a wide range of strategic partners to shape and test our proposals. This includes joint working with universities, the Integrated Care Board (ICB), police and fire services, national park authorities, educational institutions and the Freeport initiative. The Joint Local Plan and MOD stakeholders have also been part of our wider engagement footprint, ensuring alignment with regional priorities and delivery frameworks.



Key council services

In developing our proposal, we assessed local strengths, challenges, and opportunities created by reorganisation.

We prioritised high-cost, high-demand, and strategically important service areas, including adult social care, children's services, waste, planning, transport and infrastructure, housing, place and environment. We ran a bespoke workshop with service leaders from each of these areas to understand their baseline position and opportunities identified through reorganisation. The complete agenda for this session was:

- Reviewing current service delivery across the service functions
- Identifying current issues, best practices, and collaboration
- Learning from successful models elsewhere to understand where best practices could be scaled
- Spotting transformation opportunities for future services and how reorganisation could enable this

The outputs of this workshop were critical to inform this proposal, which can be found in more detail in **Criteria 3**. The conversation did not stop there, and we are now embedding these conversations and next steps into implementation planning.



Democratic approach

We have collaborated with monitoring officers, election teams, and democratic service teams across each of the councils to evaluate the future of democratic services, including indicative councillor numbers, localism, and neighbourhood governance arrangements.

The purpose of this work has been to examine how councillors may represent residents within future unitary councils. National research on unitary councillor ratios was conducted, considering Boundary Commission guidance and reviewing local requirements across Devon. This data was further reviewed in collaboration with council leaders to determine the proposed indicative outcomes. In addition:

- We determined councillor ratios by analysing national research on unitary authority models and applying Boundary Commission guidance, ensuring responsiveness to local requirements across Devon. Collaborative reviews with council leaders ensured indicative outcomes reflect both best practice and the distinct needs of each community.
- We recognise Exeter's historic, civic and ceremonial status. Drawing on best practice, and the ambitions of the Cathedral Cities Group, we suggest the establishment of charter trustees for the

city to maintain continuity of the Lord Mayor's office and associated city ceremonial traditions. This would allow for appropriate new local city area governance to be co-designed with the city's community representatives, while protecting the civic and ceremonial leadership of our city for generations to come.

- Neighbourhood governance will be central to decision-making, service oversight, and community engagement. It will be structured around appropriate Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs), co-designed with communities to reflect local identities while being part of a resilient wider system. Local Community Networks (LCNs) will extend NACs by bringing together key stakeholders to address place-based issues, ensuring governance is both representative and effective, alongside an enhanced role for towns and parishes resulting from engagement with the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC).

We want to put communities and their voice at the heart of decisions about how they are governed, working with residents and their locally elected Town and Parish representatives and councils to find the best solutions for their specific needs. Further information on the outcomes of the democratic approach is available in **Criteria 6**.



Financial sustainability

Our assessment of financial sustainability is central to our proposal, providing a clear picture of how reorganisation can strengthen long-term financial resilience, drive efficiency, and enhance the value for money of local services. Through this analysis, we have explored potential efficiencies, the necessary investment, and anticipated net gains to support informed choices for local leaders and stakeholders.

The financial review followed a structured approach across key principle stages, each outlined in Section 5, the Financial Case:

- **Collection and validation of data:** Finance officers from all councils in Devon supplied standardised datasets into the data hub, hosted by Plymouth City Council, covering revenue budgets, housing revenue accounts, dedicated school grants, council-owned companies, reserves and balance sheets.
- **Development of the baseline:** We constructed a unified financial baseline by merging existing district, county, and unitary budgets, applying agreed-upon assumptions. This enabled us to set key financial indicators for each proposed new authority and to compare across options.
- **Cost and savings projections:** We estimated the incremental impact of reorganisation across two scenarios—a base case and a stretch case, drawing on best practice from similar reorganisations elsewhere.
- **Implementation costs:** We calculated the one-off expenses required to carry out reorganisation (including staffing, programme management, and IT systems).



We also examined the costs associated with reconfiguring services from the three existing councils into the three new authorities, focusing on key cost areas such as adult social care, children's services, housing, place services, and central support functions.

Scenario modelling was used for each unitary option and both cases, phasing costs and savings over time to calculate indicative payback periods, breakeven points, and projected net financial benefits over ten years. The outputs from this modelling have guided comparative analysis of reorganisation options and informed the financial case underpinning this proposal, as well as the technical appendices (see **Appendix 2**) for transparency and auditability.

In reviewing the options, we have found the proposal for Option C – 4-5-1 to be the strongest choice to address financial pressures, rising service demand, and the constraints of the current two-tier system. This preferred model enables significant service redesign and transformation, unlocking notable efficiencies through a place-based approach, as demonstrated in our financial modelling.

Our 4-5-1 model offers the potential for payback within 2 years and 9 months, with annual savings estimated at £77 million following transformation in our base case.

Confident in our ability to deliver meaningful change, we have also developed a stretch scenario, targeting even more ambitious transformation. Under this approach, all councils could achieve payback within 2 years and 11 months (slightly longer than the base case due to the upfront investment required to benefit from longer term annual savings), with annual savings of approximately £124 million post-transformation, as additional upfront investment in transformational change is repaid to yield greater savings earlier in the convergence and enhancement cycle. **Over 10 years, the cumulative benefit derived from the base case is £508.3 million, while the stretch case offers a cumulative benefit of £805.3 million.**

We have demonstrated a rigorous and collaborative approach to designing a financially sustainable future for Devon. Through comprehensive data collection, robust scenario modelling, and partnership with our chief executives, leaders, and senior officers, we have developed an evidence-based proposal which directly aligns with the government's requirements on efficiency, resilience, and value for money. Our process has been shaped by transparent analysis, comprehensive input, and continuous engagement, ensuring that recommended reforms are both technically sound and locally responsive. Our commitment to informed decision-making and collective leadership underpins the ambition to deliver lasting benefits for all communities across the county.

Section 3: Devon context

Devon, under our 4-5-1 model, will be able to deliver transformation opportunities which deliver responsive, integrated, and locally tailored services, leveraging strategic transport networks, balanced economic investment, and collaborative leadership. By aligning growth opportunities with urban and rural strengths, supporting financial resilience, and promoting sustainable development, our region will benefit from inclusive prosperity.

Our model prioritises local empowerment, digital innovation, and environmental stewardship, while the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority will ensure cohesive leadership and effective advocacy for Devon's diverse communities. With a focus on protecting natural assets, strengthening partnerships, and boosting regional identity, our approach is designed to deliver lasting social, economic, and environmental benefits for all parts of Devon.

Devon is a large and diverse county in South West England, covering approximately 2,687 square miles (6,960 square kilometres) and it is home to over 1.2m residents. The county's geography is defined by two coastlines, two national parks (Dartmoor and Exmoor), and a range of nationally protected landscapes and internationally important UNESCO sites. The area includes a mix of urban centres, market towns, coastal communities, and deeply rural villages, each contributing to the county's distinctive character and economic profile. Within this geography, there are two distinct regions (Southern and Northern) with different challenges and transport ecosystems. Our proposed 4-5-1 model, comprising a unitary for Southern Devon, comprising South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon (the "4"), a unitary authority for Northern Devon, comprising East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon and Torridge (the "5") and Plymouth retaining its existing unitary status (the "1"), offers a comprehensive and balanced solution. It is designed to address the county's most pressing issues while unlocking exciting opportunities for place-based delivery and transformation, integration, and sustainable growth, which we believe cannot be fully maximised under any other option or configuration.

North Devon

Area and Economy

Our economy is diverse, with key sectors including health and social care, agri-food, construction, tourism, and advanced manufacturing. The visitor economy, agri-food, and health and social care sectors alone provide 212,000 jobs, representing 47% of all employment in Devon and contributing £8.7 billion in gross value added (GVA) annually. The county is also home to a growing digital and creative sector, with strong performing clusters in professional services, marine industries, and clean energy, including floating offshore wind in the Celtic Sea.

Devon is home to a nationally significant photonics and microelectronics cluster centred in Torbay and Teignbridge, supporting over 1,000 jobs and more than 40 businesses, with new investments expected to further boost local GVA. The marine sector, anchored by Plymouth and Brixham, provides over 22,000 jobs and is valued at nearly £7 billion, while Brixham's fishing industry alone has seen substantial growth in both value and employment.

Digital and creative industries are also expanding rapidly, supporting over 10,000 jobs and generating an estimated £500 million in GVA, with strong clusters in Exeter, North Devon, and Torbay. Clean energy, particularly floating offshore wind in the Celtic Sea, is an emerging strength, projected to create up to 3,000 jobs and £1 billion in GVA by 2030. Advanced engineering, professional services, and pharmaceuticals further contribute to the region's economic diversity, with Exeter and surrounding districts benefiting from higher GVA per capita due to these sectors.

The South West Innovation Spine, included in Devon and Torbay's draft Local Growth Plan, running through Exeter, Torbay, and Plymouth, will be a nationally significant corridor for science, technology, and environmental innovation. This corridor will support high-value sectors such as photonics, environmental sustainability, green hydrogen, artificial intelligence, and advanced manufacturing, and is underpinned by a highly productive professional business services sector. The



region's blue and green infrastructure, including its ports, rivers, and agricultural land, supports a robust maritime sector and provides opportunities for clean energy and sustainable food production.

Devon's rural areas, including coastal, market and coastal towns and villages, are characterised by strong agricultural traditions, a high proportion of small and micro businesses, and a reliance on seasonal and tourism-related employment. Several Local and Joint Local Plans in Devon highlight the importance of supporting rural diversification, protecting agricultural land, and promoting sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments. Reflecting the diversity of economies in the north, there are also thriving pharmaceutical and advanced engineering sectors, hosting international

companies, such as TDK and PAL. North Devon is home to a thriving pharmaceutical cluster, rooted in a strategic decision from the 1970s to encourage a more balanced regional distribution of industry across the UK. This foresight led to the establishment of key pharmaceutical companies in the area, which today collectively employ over 2,000 people.

Transport infrastructure in Devon includes strategic road links such as the M5, A30, A361 and A38, and rail connections to London and the wider South West. Exeter Airport also plays a vital role in enhancing regional and national connectivity. While commuting times are generally in line with national averages, public transport remains limited in rural areas, affecting access to employment, education, and services. Digital connectivity is improving, with gigabit broadband coverage close to the

national average and 5G availability exceeding 80% in most areas, but rural North and West Devon continue to experience pockets of low coverage.

Devon's natural environment is a defining feature of the county. Local Plans across Devon both emphasise the importance of conserving and enhancing landscape character, biodiversity, and green infrastructure. Policies require new development to protect designated landscapes such as national landscapes and national parks, the undeveloped coast, and heritage assets, and to deliver biodiversity net gain and sustainable drainage systems. Devon's green infrastructure network, including parks, woodlands, and open spaces, is protected and enhanced through planning obligations and community engagement.



Current Local Government Landscape and Partnership Working

Devon's local government structure includes a mix of two-tier and unitary arrangements.

Torbay Council, Plymouth City Council and Devon County Council provide upper-tier services such as education, highways, adult social care, and public health. Eight district councils deliver essential local services including planning, housing, waste collection, and community development. Plymouth and Torbay operate as standalone unitary authorities, each with their own local plans and strategic priorities.

Devon benefits from several county-wide public services that support its communities across all regions. The Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service is the largest non-metropolitan fire service in England, covering over 13,000 miles of roads—90% of which are rural roads and country lanes. Devon and Cornwall Police provide policing across the entire county, including the unitary authorities of Plymouth and Torbay. Health services are delivered through multiple NHS Trusts, including the Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, ensuring coverage across both urban and rural areas.

Devon: Three distinct localities

Devon's scale and complexity present both opportunities and challenges. The county is a large and unique place, with distinct local identities, communities, needs and priorities. These align with three distinct geographical sub-regions; Southern Devon including Torbay, Northern Devon including Exeter City, and Plymouth, each contributing uniquely to the county's identity and economy. Understanding their individual characteristics is essential to shaping effective governance and service delivery:

- **Southern Devon** covers South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon. The area features coastal towns, rural villages, and urban centres, with tourism, agriculture, and marine industries shaping the economy. Innovation and high-tech sectors are growing, powered by the regional Freeport and clean energy projects. While some urban areas benefit from strong infrastructure and digital connectivity, rural locations face challenges related to transport, housing affordability, and an ageing population. Shared services and community hubs help streamline service delivery, but demographic pressures and the digital divide remain key issues.
- **Northern Devon** is a predominantly rural region encompassing East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge. While most of the area is characterised by low population density and traditional sectors like agriculture and tourism, Exeter stands out as a dynamic urban centre driving regional innovation, education, and rapid economic growth. New industries such as clean energy and aquaculture are emerging, supported by strategic initiatives and partnerships. However, disparities in productivity, housing affordability, and digital connectivity persist, particularly outside Exeter. Local governance is currently two-tiered, with collaborative efforts underway to address cross-boundary challenges and improve service integration.
- **Plymouth**, as a major city and unitary authority, has a diverse economy centred on defence, marine industries, and advanced manufacturing. Significant investments, such as the Devonport Dockyard and Freeport, support high-value jobs and economic diversification. The city's cultural institutions, including the Theatre Royal and The Box, enhance regional significance. Plymouth faces challenges in meeting housing demand and tackling socio-economic inequalities, with a quarter of its population economically inactive and some wards among the most deprived nationally. Strategic planning, partnerships, and digital innovation are central to addressing these issues and ensuring inclusive, resilient growth.



How our 4-5-1 model will open doors to opportunity and addresses key current challenges

There are a number of key challenges faced by Devon's councils and communities under the current system which reflect both local and national issues. However, through our 4-5-1 model, we are confident that many of these challenges can be addressed effectively, while providing an exciting platform to unlock future transformative opportunities and reimagine Devon.

Challenge: Rurality and Access

Difficulties faced by current configuration

- Devon's largely rural character presents unique challenges in accessing public services, transport, and digital infrastructure.
- Remote communities may face isolation and have limited availability of healthcare, education, and social support.
- Infrastructure gaps impact economic opportunity and connectivity across rural and coastal areas.

How our 4-5-1 addresses these challenges

Our 4-5-1 model offers significant opportunities to address the needs of Devon's ageing population more effectively. By creating more balanced and responsive councils, our model enables targeted strategies for supporting older residents, from improving access to health and social care to enhancing community-based services that reduce isolation. Our approach will also facilitate innovation in housing, transport, and digital inclusion, ensuring that demographic trends are met with proactive solutions that enhance quality of life and support independent living for older people across the region. This supports our ambition to build localised and high-performing services, ensuring services are connected closer to communities, responsive to local needs, and integrated with voluntary and community providers. It also enables stronger alignment with health and ICS footprints, supporting hyper-local delivery models.

Challenge: Deprivation Amidst Affluence

Difficulties faced by current configuration

- Although Devon features pockets of prosperity, significant deprivation persists across urban and rural communities.
- Hidden poverty exists, with some families struggling to meet basic needs despite the county's overall affluence.
- Social inequality creates disparities in health, education, and life chances between communities.

How our 4-5-1 addresses these challenges

Our 4-5-1 model offers a comprehensive framework for identifying and addressing deprivation that exists alongside affluence in Devon's communities. Through more localised and responsive councils, our model enables targeted interventions to reach families and individuals experiencing hidden poverty, ensuring that resources and support are directed where they are most needed. By promoting closer collaboration with agencies, voluntary and community organisations such as the poverty health commission, as well as aligning with health and social care partners, our model helps to bridge gaps in service provision, tackle social inequality, and improve health, education, and life outcomes for those facing disadvantage within otherwise prosperous areas. Leveraging strong local institutions such as Local Community Networks (LCNs) and town/parish councils, our proposed model supports subsidiarity and ensures that local voices are heard and acted upon. In this respect, we can build on the success of work already in progress at a grass roots level, illustrated in the case studies from North Devon and East Devon. Our approach ensures that no community is overlooked and that opportunities for positive change are maximised across the county.



Challenge: Service Pressures (including Children's Services)

Difficulties faced by current configuration

- Demand for statutory services such as children's services continues to rise, placing pressure on local authority resources.
- Safeguarding children and supporting vulnerable families require significant investment and effective coordination.
- Other essential services, including adult social care and health, are similarly stretched by demographic and financial pressures.

How our 4-5-1 addresses these challenges

Our 4-5-1 model creates significant opportunities to address service pressures by establishing more agile and responsive local authorities, able to adapt to rising demand and complex statutory requirements. By taking advantage of economies of scale in commissioning, our model supports bold and strong leadership, ensuring consistent service standards across Devon. The removal of two-tier provision simplifies governance, enabling swifter and more effective preventative responses, and realigns district and upper-tier responsibilities to integrate people services with housing and leisure. This integration is exemplified by place-based delivery through family hubs and the alignment of services such as leisure, demonstrated by Torridge's LATCo, towards health prevention and closer collaboration with NHS partners.

Our proposal maintains the current number of unitary authorities, facilitating a straightforward transition and avoiding an increase in the number of directors of children's services. This structure addresses historic scale challenges faced by smaller councils, providing a sustainable and resilient foundation for safeguarding and children's services, and enables the spread of high-performing functions, such as those developed in Torbay, across a wider area. By leveraging robust data and analytics tools, future councils can proactively identify and respond to emerging pressures, ensuring earlier and more targeted interventions where most needed. The reconfiguration is designed to foster a culture of learning, improvement, and financial sustainability, retaining three children's services functions but accelerating improvement and change.

As a catalyst for modernisation, our 4-5-1 model is aligned with the wider public sector reform agenda and supports transformative, integrated services, particularly in education and safeguarding, through stronger partnership with health and ICS footprints. There is clear government precedent for realigning services to address institutional weakness and historic service failure, with rapid improvement often following cultural change and new leadership. Through these reforms, our model ensures that service delivery is consistently high-quality, innovative, and responsive to the complex needs of Devon's communities.

Challenge: Ageing Population

Difficulties faced by current configuration

- Devon has a disproportionately older population, with increasing demand for health and social care services.
- Ageing communities challenge local services to adapt and respond to complex needs, including dementia and long-term conditions.
- Recruitment and retention in the care workforce are ongoing concerns.

How our 4-5-1 addresses these challenges

Our 4-5-1 model presents a valuable opportunity to reshape how Devon responds to its ageing population. By enabling councils to work more closely with health and social care partners, our model supports the development of integrated services tailored to the complex needs of older residents, such as those living with dementia or chronic health conditions. It also encourages the pooling of resources and expertise from voluntary and community organisations, allowing for more creative solutions in areas like preventative care, social inclusion, and accessible transport. Through a localised and responsive approach, our 4-5-1 model enhances our capacity to recruit and retain a skilled care workforce, while ensuring that older people remain at the heart of decision-making and service design. This not only helps to relieve pressure on stretched services but also promotes independence, wellbeing, and dignity for Devon's older citizens.



Challenge: Housing and Economic Growth

Difficulties faced by current configuration

- Access to affordable, quality housing is limited in many areas, with prices outstripping local income levels.
- Economic growth is uneven, and some communities struggle to attract investment, employment, and business opportunities.
- Planning and infrastructure development must balance community needs, environmental impact, and sustainable growth.

How our 4-5-1 addresses these challenges

Our 4-5-1 model facilitates coordinated spatial planning across Devon’s natural housing market areas, aligning governance structures with real communities and economic geographies. By promoting collaboration between councils, housing providers, and local businesses, our model drives innovative solutions to increase affordable housing supply, improve infrastructure, and support sustainable growth aligned with the government’s growth and productivity agenda. The new Northern unitary is positioned to harness the growth potential of the Greater Exeter area, including Exeter Science Park, Enterprise Zones, and capitalise on opportunities such as the Celtic Sea Floating Offshore Wind (FLOW) in North Devon and Torridge. The model also brings together all current stock-retaining councils within the new North unitary area, maximising the opportunities for economies of scale, operational synergy, and accelerating the delivery of additional social housing via council housebuilding. Meanwhile, the Southern unitary supports regeneration in Torbay and promotes sustainable development in South Hams. This integrated approach strengthens the region’s capacity to attract investment, secure infrastructure funding, and deliver vital housing and services for growing communities. By linking economic clusters and key sectors, including Plymouth’s defence and marine innovation hub, our model advances Devon’s industrial strategy and unlocks inward investment, supporting high-skilled employment and aligning with national priorities. Additionally, by connecting housing strategies with health and deprivation initiatives, and enabling tailored, environmentally responsible local responses, such as those shaped by the Devon Housing Taskforce, our model ensures interventions address wider determinants of wellbeing, revitalise high streets, and promote inclusive prosperity throughout Devon.



Challenge: Financial Sustainability

Difficulties faced by current configuration

- Current financial constraints threaten the delivery and quality of public services.
- The risk of increasing costs through service fragmentation or duplication is heightened if smaller unitaries are formed.
- Sustainable funding models are needed to maintain and enhance community services for the long term.

How our 4-5-1 addresses these challenges

Our 4-5-1 model provides a robust framework for enhancing financial sustainability across Devon by promoting strategic collaboration and resource sharing among local authorities, public sector partners, and community organisations. Through streamlined service delivery and joint commissioning, our model minimises the risk of duplication and fragmentation, ensuring that public funds are used efficiently and effectively. By harnessing collective buying power and focusing on innovative funding arrangements, such as social investment and community-led initiatives, our model opens the door to new revenue streams and cost-saving opportunities. This collaborative approach not only secures the long-term viability of essential services but also builds financial resilience, enabling Devon to adapt proactively to future challenges while delivering improved outcomes for residents.

Challenge: Education Attainment

Difficulties faced by current configuration

- Some areas within Devon experience lower academic performance at GCSE and A-Level.
- Large disparities in education outcomes exist across Devon as a whole.
- Uptake of apprenticeships is limited, reducing opportunities for practical learning and employment.
- Talent drain as young people leave the area for education and work elsewhere.

How our 4-5-1 addresses these challenges

Our 4-5-1 model presents significant opportunities to address disparities in education attainment across Devon by enabling closer collaboration between local authorities, schools, colleges, employers, and community organisations. By pooling resources and expertise, our model enables the development of targeted interventions to raise academic performance at both GCSE and A-Level, as well as expanding access to high-quality apprenticeships and vocational training. Furthermore, strategic partnerships established through this framework can create new pathways for practical learning, support the retention of local talent, and ensure that young people are equipped with the skills needed for future employment and personal development. Our proposal aligns with natural travel patterns and educational offerings, with the highly rated Exeter College proposing to merge with Petroc College in North Devon to provide high quality further education across the Exeter and Northern Devon area. In doing so, our 4-5-1 model not only helps to close the education gap but also strengthens the long-term prospects for individuals and communities throughout Devon.

Challenge: Political and Regional Influence

Difficulties faced by current configuration

- Devon’s current governance structure lacks cohesion and strategic focus, weakening its voice in regional and national arenas.
- Dispersed leadership and competing priorities hinder the county’s ability to present a united front for investment and policy change.
- Limited influence in securing devolved powers, funding, and leading transformative projects.

How our 4-5-1 addresses these challenges

Our 4-5-1 model offers a transformative opportunity to enhance Devon’s political and regional influence by creating a more unified and strategic approach to governance. By consolidating leadership and aligning local priorities across local authorities, our model strengthens Devon’s collective voice when advocating for investment, policy reform, devolved powers at both regional and national levels and positions the region as a credible candidate for a future mayoral model of a Mayoral Strategic Authority. Interim governance arrangements will balance strategic leadership with community representation, supported by mechanisms such as Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) and Local Community Networks (LCNs). This coordinated framework empowers the county to more effectively secure funding, lead ambitious projects, and shape policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of its communities. Through our 4-5-1 model, Devon can better position itself as a proactive and influential partner in wider regional initiatives, ensuring that its interests are consistently represented and advanced.

Challenge: Environmental Sustainability

Difficulties faced by current configuration

- Devon’s natural environment, including national parks and national landscapes, is not adequately protected under current governance structures.
- Opportunities for sustainable development are often missed due to fragmented oversight and lack of coordinated action.
- Environmental initiatives, such as the Devon Climate Emergency, highlight the urgent need for comprehensive solutions to climate and ecological challenges.

How our 4-5-1 addresses these challenges

Our 4-5-1 model unlocks significant opportunities for advancing environmental sustainability throughout Devon by fostering coordinated action and shared stewardship of our natural assets. Through unified governance, our model enables more effective protection of national parks and national landscapes, ensuring that environmental priorities are embedded into strategic planning and development. By consolidating oversight, it facilitates collaborative approaches to climate resilience, biodiversity enhancement, and the delivery of county-wide initiatives such as the Devon Climate Emergency. This structure also supports the integration of sustainable transport, renewable energy projects, and responsible land management practices, helping communities to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to ecological challenges. Ultimately, our 4-5-1 model positions Devon to lead in innovative, locally driven solutions that safeguard the environment for future generations.



Our 4-5-1 model presents an exciting step forward for Devon, one that not only unites our governance but also unlocks a landscape of opportunity for every community. By embracing a “test, learn, and grow” mindset, we’re laying the groundwork for dynamic local service delivery, genuine partnership with voluntary and community sectors, and a culture that is adaptive, resilient, and continuously improving. Our comprehensive, place-based solution will integrate the unique strengths of each of our areas, ensuring balanced progress across urban, rural, and coastal settings, while providing the financial and operational stability needed to thrive into the future.



West Devon

Section 4: Government criteria



In this section, we will outline our case for change aligned with each of the six Government criteria and supporting guidance:

Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government	✓ Sensible economic areas which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area. ✓ Sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs. ✓ Effective structures which can deliver positive outcomes.
Criteria 2: Efficiency, capacity and withstanding financial shocks	✓ The right population size for the area ✓ Improving council finances through efficiencies ✓ Managing transition costs and enabling transformation ✓ Managing council debt
Criteria 3: High quality and sustainable public services	✓ Improving service delivery and avoiding fragmentation ✓ Opportunities to deliver public service reform ✓ Minimising impact on crucial services
Criteria 4: Working together to understand and meet local needs	✓ Meaningful and constructive local engagement ✓ Considering local identity and cultural and historic importance ✓ Addressing local concerns
Criteria 5: Supporting devolution arrangements	✓ The existing County Combined Authority and the route to a Mayoral Strategic Authority ✓ Unlocking devolution ✓ Equal representation under a Combined Authority
Criteria 6: Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	✓ Creating strong community engagement ✓ Building on existing community engagement



Torbay

Criteria 1:

Establishing a single tier of local government

Our model offers a framework for restructuring local government across Devon to better reflect the county’s complex geography, diverse communities, and economic interdependencies.

We propose the creation of three unitaries — North, South, and standalone Plymouth — each designed to align with natural communities, travel-to-work patterns, and service needs. Our model leverages existing regional strengths and collaborative arrangements while aiming for stronger local representation, integrated planning, and more effective delivery of services across both urban and rural areas.

We also outline the challenges and opportunities presented by Devon’s varied transport infrastructure and the disparities in access faced by different parts of the county.

Criteria one focuses on the ability for an option to establish an effective single tier of local government. According to guidance provided by the government, there are three key areas that we address throughout this section:

Criteria 1a	Sensible economic areas which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.
Criteria 1b	Sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.
Criteria 1d	Effective structures which can deliver positive outcomes.

Note: We propose that criteria 1c ‘Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement’ is established throughout the case, particularly the options appraisal process, the financial case and the engagement evidenced in **Criteria 6**.

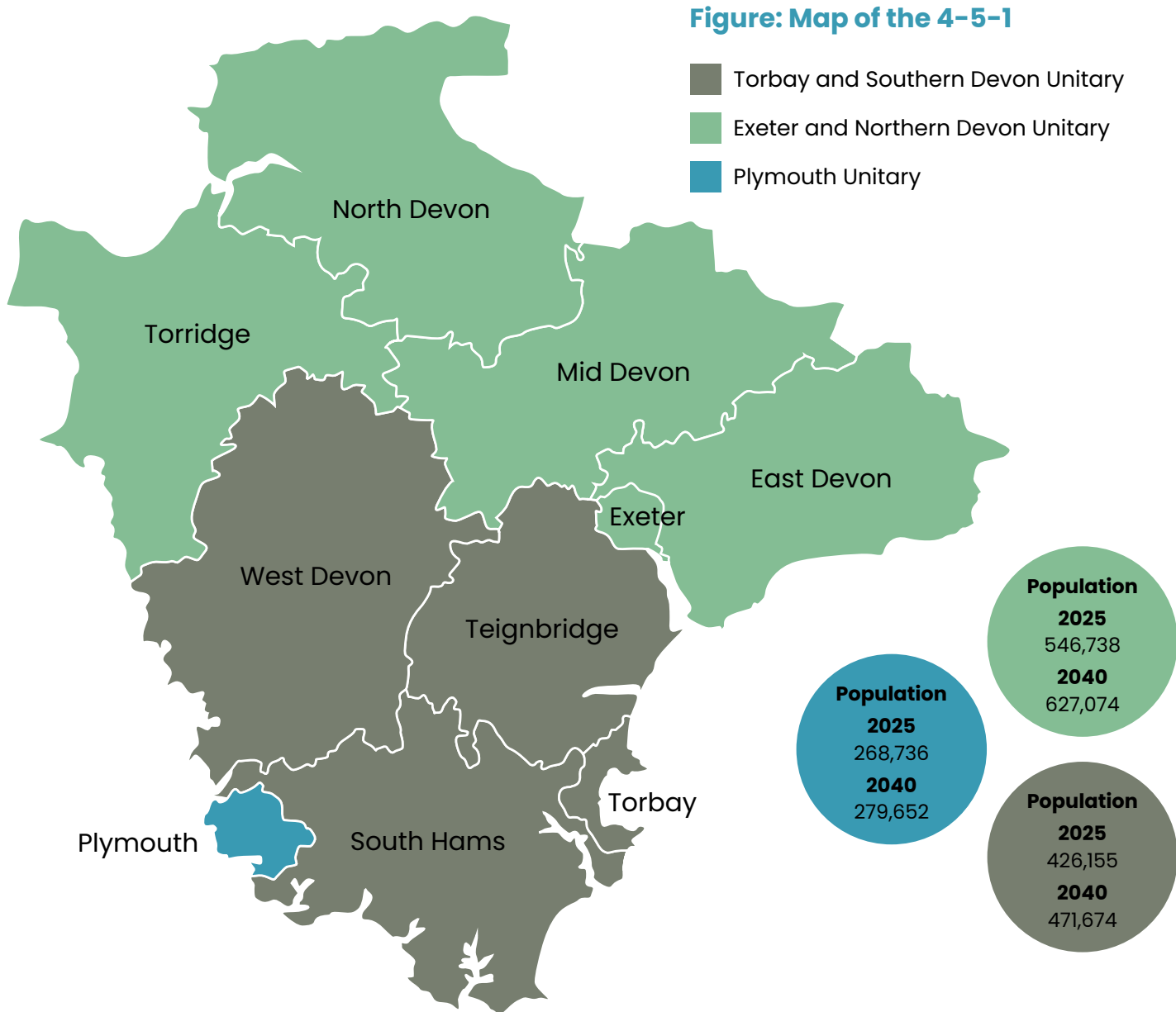
Establishing three sensible geographies

Devon’s scale and diversity present a longstanding challenge for local government. The county encompasses deeply rural areas, coastal towns, and urban centres, each with distinct identities, service needs, and economic profiles. Our model responds to this complexity by grouping areas into coherent units that reflect natural communities, travel-to-work patterns, infrastructure and functional economic geographies.

The Southern Devon unitary consolidates South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay, and West Devon. These areas have a history of

collaboration, particularly through joint local plans and regeneration partnerships. The inclusion of Dartmoor adds a strong rural dimension, while Torbay’s coastal economy and urban challenges are balanced by the strengths of neighbouring districts. Together, they form a geography that is both diverse and coherent, capable of delivering services that are tailored to local needs while benefiting from shared capacity and strategic alignment.

The Northern Devon unitary brings together East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge – areas with strong economic and social ties. Exeter acts as a major regional hub, offering employment, education, and transport links that benefit the wider area, while the surrounding districts contribute significant



rural, agricultural, and environmental assets. Both Exeter and Barnstaple serve as key public administration centres, each supporting broad catchment areas and connected by important road and rail corridors. This configuration reflects shared economic and cultural characteristics, underpinned by a history of effective partnership working. By aligning these areas within a single authority, our model enables integrated planning and service delivery across a geography that matches real housing and labour markets, shared infrastructure, and strategic priorities.

Plymouth’s retention as a standalone unitary reflects its distinct urban character and existing governance arrangements. As a city with nationally significant assets and infrastructure, Plymouth is well placed to continue delivering integrated services and contributing to regional growth.

Travel infrastructure and travel to work in Devon

Devon’s transport infrastructure is shaped by its vast geography and dispersed settlement patterns. As one of England’s largest counties by land area, Devon faces unique challenges in ensuring equitable access to services, employment, and education. The county’s transport network includes strategic road links such as the M5, A30, A361 and A38, which connect Devon to the wider South West and national corridors. Rail infrastructure, including the Barnstaple–Exeter line and connections to Plymouth and London and Tarka Line between Exeter and Barnstaple, Exmouth and Okehampton, supports regional mobility but remains limited in coverage, particularly in rural areas.

While commuting times across Devon are broadly in line with national averages, the experience of travel varies significantly between urban and rural communities. Exeter, as a regional centre, benefits from concentrated infrastructure and frequent public transport services. Its role as a hub for employment, education, and innovation means that many residents from surrounding districts rely on reliable connections to the city. However, in North Devon, Torrridge, and parts of West Devon, public transport options in particular bus are sparse or non-existent, and long travel times are common. This affects access not only to jobs and schools but also to healthcare and other essential services, while also adding to growing pressures around social mobility, isolation and loneliness.

Digital connectivity is improving, with gigabit broadband coverage approaching national levels and 5G availability exceeding 80% in most areas. Yet, pockets of low coverage persist across many rural areas, compounding the challenges of physical isolation. These disparities in infrastructure and connectivity contribute to uneven economic development and social outcomes across the county.

Our model offers a more coherent framework for addressing these challenges. By aligning governance with travel-to-work areas and infrastructure corridors, our model enables each new authority to plan and invest in transport systems that reflect the lived realities of their communities.

The Southern Devon unitary brings together districts with shared transport challenges and opportunities. Dartmoor introduces a rural dimension, while Torbay's urban centres require investment in coastal transport routes and public mobility solutions. The area's existing collaboration on planning and infrastructure, including joint local plans (e.g. the joint Local Transport Plan for Devon and Torbay) and regeneration strategies, provides a foundation for integrated transport delivery. Strategic investment in link roads, bus services, and rail connectivity can be better coordinated under a single authority, ensuring that growth is supported by accessible and sustainable transport.



The North unitary can focus on enhancing connectivity along the A30, A361 (North Devon Link Road) and M5 corridors, improving rail services through the Devon Metro proposals and improvements to the Tarka Line, and supporting integrated transport planning across Exeter. Partnerships with further education providers such as Petroc and Exeter College already support vertically integrated skills pipelines and transport coordination, which can be scaled under a unified authority.

Plymouth, as a standalone unitary, continues to lead on urban transport planning. Its established infrastructure, including dockside employment zones and rail links, supports regional mobility and economic development. The city's partnerships with South Hams through the Joint Local Plan and Freeport, and the wider South West demonstrate the benefits of cross-boundary collaboration, which can be maintained and enhanced under our model.

Our proposed configuration supports a place-based approach to transport planning that truly reflects the diversity of Devon's communities and promotes inclusive access to opportunities. While strategic transport and infrastructure planning is most effective at the CCA/MSA level, it remains essential to ensure that local needs are clearly articulated and integrated into this wider framework. With three unitary authorities, each with a deep understanding of their areas, our model strengthens the alignment between local priorities and regional strategy. By removing the fragmentation of the two-tier system, we enable more strategic, targeted investment in infrastructure, ensuring it is both responsive to local needs and consistent with broader economic and environmental objectives.

CASE STUDY

Okehampton Interchange new railway station

“The currency of trust underpins our outlook and is the cornerstone for our success.”

Building on the recent success of reopening the Exeter to Okehampton railway line, West Devon Borough Council submitted a Levelling Up Funding 2 bid to the Government for £13.5m to construct a railway station on the edge of Okehampton, immediately adjacent to the A30. This strategic location is designed to serve travellers from east Cornwall, north Devon, and West Devon, providing a genuinely convenient link to the heavy rail network for hundreds of thousands of passengers annually.

The project features a “parkway” style train station, integrating transport links such as buses, cars, pedestrian access, and cycling facilities. Collaboration between West Devon Borough Council and Devon County Council ensures matched funding and the achievement of sustainable outcomes, distinguishing this initiative from less holistic infrastructure projects.

Agreements have been formalised through a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding with DLUHC, Devon County Council, and West Devon Borough Council, supported by a bilateral agreement between the councils. Governance arrangements include programme board representation from respective Senior Responsible Owners and finance officers.

While a robust legal framework and governance structure are in place to support successful delivery, it is the effective partnership with Devon County Council and rail stakeholders, developed during the rail line's reopening, that unlocked this opportunity. The Joint Local Plan provided the policy framework and evidence base for the bid, with collaboration among community groups, town, borough, and county councils clearly articulated, instilling confidence in DLUHC to support the project.

It is expected that the station will be brought into service in May 2026.





Supporting strategic connectivity through functional geographies

Devon's geography is not only vast but deeply varied, encompassing urban centres, market towns, coastal communities, and remote rural areas. This diversity has long challenged the ability of local government to plan and deliver infrastructure in a way that reflects how people actually live, work, and travel. The current two-tier system fragments responsibility for transport, planning, and infrastructure, often leading to duplication, misalignment, and missed opportunities for strategic investment.

Our model addresses these limitations by aligning governance with functional geographies—those areas where economic activity, commuting patterns, and service use naturally converge. By grouping districts that share infrastructure corridors, travel-to-work areas, and housing markets, our model enables each new authority to take a more integrated and responsive approach to connectivity. This also enables each authority to design a focussed growth narrative and inward investment offer for their respective areas. With devolution in place, these distinct offers can then feed into a wider Local Growth Plan for the region, aligning with the government's Industrial Strategy and delivering on its mission for growth.



The Southern Devon unitary, covering South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay, and West Devon, reflect a coherent geography. Torbay's urban centres anchor the region's coastal economy, while existing joint planning arrangements between South Hams and West Devon (and Plymouth) demonstrate the benefits of cross-boundary working, and the area's shared transport challenges, such as limited public mobility in rural areas and congestion in urban centres, can be addressed more effectively under a single governance structure. Investment in link roads, bus services, and rail connectivity can be coordinated to support both regeneration and environmental sustainability.

In the north and east, the Northern Devon unitary brings together Exeter and the adjacent districts of East Devon and Mid Devon with North Devon and Torridge. This configuration allows continued collaboration with Exeter as a regional centre for employment, education, and transport while respecting the unique characteristics of northern Devon and history of partnership working. The Barnstaple–Exeter rail line, for example, is a critical link for communities in North Devon and Torridge, supporting both economic integration, social mobility and enhancements to this will reduce the travel to work times. The area's infrastructure links with Somerset, including strategic road and rail connections, offer further opportunities for cross-boundary



collaboration and investment. Under a unified authority, these assets can be better leveraged to support growth and improve access to services. It is no coincidence that Exeter College, one of the highest-rated further education colleges in the country, is planning to merge with Petroc College based in Barnstaple, North Devon. It recognises that this place is an area beyond that simply imagined by council boundaries. This is a place bound together by common connecting infrastructure, with road and rail networks underpinning shared education service provision and access to future work opportunities. It is a place that the new council can represent with confidence to flourish, for enhanced economic and educational outcomes, using increased productivity and prosperity to help address its own challenges.

Plymouth, as the “1” in our model, retains its role as a standalone urban authority. Its established transport infrastructure, including dockside employment zones and rail links, supports regional mobility and economic development. The city's partnerships with South Hams and the wider South West, including joint work on railway timetabling and strategic planning, exemplify the benefits of functional collaboration. These relationships can be maintained and enhanced under our model, ensuring that Plymouth continues to contribute to regional connectivity while focusing on its urban priorities.

Our model also supports the development of integrated spatial strategies that reflect the realities of movement and service use across geographic Devon and creates a platform for the successful introduction of a Spatial Development Strategy for Devon. Travel-to-work flows, hospital catchments, and education provision often span multiple districts, and the current system struggles to coordinate planning across these boundaries. By aligning governance with these functional geographies, our model enables authorities to plan infrastructure around real patterns of demand, rather than administrative convenience.

This approach is particularly important in the context of environmental sustainability and climate resilience. Coordinated investment in transport and infrastructure can support modal shift, reduce emissions, and protect natural assets. Our model provides the scale needed to deliver on net zero ambitions, while retaining the local knowledge required to tailor interventions to each landscape.

In sum, our model offers a strategic framework for connectivity that is grounded in the lived experience of Devon's communities and a strong understanding and appreciation of place. It replaces fragmentation with coherence, enabling each authority to plan and deliver infrastructure that supports inclusive growth, environmental stewardship, and long-term resilience.

Strategic transport corridors across the unitary regions

The county’s strategic road network—including the M5, A30, A38, and A361—connects urban centres, market towns, and rural communities, and plays a critical role in supporting economic activity, commuting, and access to services. Rail infrastructure, while present, is limited in coverage and frequency, particularly in rural districts such as Torridge and West Devon.

Our model enables a more coherent and responsive approach to transport planning by aligning governance with functional geographies and travel-to-work areas. Each unitary authority would be better positioned to coordinate investment, manage infrastructure delivery, and respond to local transport needs. Recent developments, such as the opening of the new Okehampton Parkway station in early 2026, have significantly improved rail connectivity for Okehampton and Northern Devon, providing direct links to Exeter and beyond. In addition, there is ongoing partnership work with Plymouth to make the case for reinstating the rail line between Tavistock and Plymouth, which is a long-held aspiration for the Borough and a strategically important project to support commuting into the city, particularly in light of major MoD investment.

The South unitary includes areas with significant transport challenges, including limited public mobility in rural zones and congestion in urban centres. The A38 corridor and coastal transport routes are essential for connectivity and economic development. Joint planning arrangements already in place between South Hams and West Devon provide a foundation for integrated transport strategies, which can be scaled under a single authority. Investment in link roads, bus services, and rail connectivity can be better coordinated to support regeneration and sustainable growth.

The North unitary reflects the strategic importance of the M5 and A30 corridors, which support commuting, freight movement, and



access to regional hubs. The Barnstaple–Exeter rail line is a key asset for North Devon and Torridge, and under a unified authority, its integration with wider transport planning can be strengthened. Existing partnerships with further education providers such as Petroc and Exeter College offer opportunities to align transport with skills and employment strategies.

Plymouth, as a standalone unitary, retains its established transport infrastructure and strategic planning capacity. Its dockside employment zones, rail links, and partnerships with neighbouring authorities position it to continue leading urban transport initiatives. The city’s existing collaboration with South Hams and the wider South West demonstrates the benefits of cross-boundary working, which can be maintained and enhanced under the proposed model.

Our configuration supports a place-based approach to transport planning, enabling each authority to tailor infrastructure investment to the needs of its communities. It removes the fragmentation of the two-tier system, allowing for more strategic coordination and integration between transport and land use planning. This is particularly important for addressing disparities in access and connectivity (for example, in the proposed “5” where transport links are very different in Exeter/East Devon than they are in North Devon) and for supporting inclusive growth across Devon and ensuring the timely delivery of infrastructure to support housing growth.

Government Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government

Assessment Metric	Southern	Northern	Plymouth
Geographic area (sq km)	2,869.38	3,883.26	84.37
Council Tax band D (average)	2,397.65	2,395.84	2,325.42
Council Tax band D (max)	2,463.55	2,433.26	2,325.42
GVA per capita (£)	20,452.65	28,790.76	25,936.23
Housing Delivery (%)	100%	114%	113%
Population density	148.52	140.79	3,185.37
Council Tax base	167,275.81	199,805.66	76,557.00

Creating a balanced economy and tax base

Geographic Devon economic geography is characterised by significant variation in productivity, tax base, and employment patterns. Our model responds to this complexity by grouping areas into coherent units that balance economic strength with service demand and fiscal resilience.

The Southern Devon unitary brings together South Devon’s coastal and rural economies, including Torbay’s tourism sector and South Hams’ emerging clean energy industries. These areas, while facing challenges such as seasonal employment and housing affordability, also offer significant opportunities

for regeneration and diversification. The coastline from Dawlish through to Salcombe forms a natural corridor for visitors and associated businesses, making South Devon a well-established and recognisable destination. The region’s vibrant tourism and hospitality sector is closely linked to its marine industries, with coastal communities benefiting from a steady flow of visitors, maritime events, and related economic activity. By consolidating these areas into a single authority, our proposal builds on these strengths, enabling strategic investment and planning that reflects the shared economic interests, infrastructure, and challenges of the region, while supporting the continued growth of tourism, marine innovation, and sustainable coastal development.



The inclusion of Exeter within the Northern Devon unitary ensures that the benefits of a high-performing urban economy, such as elevated GVA per capita, a strong business rates base, and demand for skilled labour, are not isolated but shared across surrounding districts. This configuration supports a more equitable distribution of resources using the environment in the North as a test bed for research and enables the surrounding rural and coastal areas to benefit from Exeter's innovation ecosystem, transport infrastructure, and employment opportunities while also harnessing unique opportunities to develop new sectors, such as in relation to renewable energy and clean technologies. There are significant emerging clean energy opportunities off the Northern Devon coast, which have the potential to serve as a catalyst for investment, skills development, and job creation in the region. By linking these opportunities with the education and innovation sectors in and around Exeter, we can promote greater linkages and support the development of a dynamic regional cluster.

Plymouth's retention as a standalone unitary reflects its distinct economic role and existing capacity to manage services and investment at scale. As a centre for marine industries, defence, and higher education, Plymouth contributes significantly to the regional economy and benefits from established governance structures that support integrated service delivery. Plymouth's population is currently 268,736 (4-5-1+ 275,336), rising to 279,652 (4-5-1+ 293,459) by 2040. We do not believe that this creates imbalance to detriment of Devon as a whole and have outlined in this case the strong justification for Plymouth retaining its status as a standalone unitary authority.

Across all three authorities, our model ensures that council tax and business rates bases are balanced, avoiding undue advantage or disadvantage for any part of the county. This creates a foundation for financial sustainability and enables each authority to plan and deliver services with confidence and clarity.

CASE STUDY

Fish & High-tech Chips

In seeking to drive up productivity, earnings, and economic performance, two strategically important sectors – electronics & photonics and fishing – offer long term sustainable jobs in a coastal community dominated by seasonal employment.

Tackling the economic challenges around productivity, earnings, skills and health is just part of Devon, Plymouth and Torbay's ambition for the people who live and work here to be better connected, more competitive and more prosperous.

With potential in both traditional and growth sectors, fish and hi-tech chips in Torbay demonstrates how deeper devolution can help to level up the area. Both sectors have high export potential and through using internationally competitive assets can bring about positive change and increase productivity.

Brixham Fish Quay

Brixham is a long-established port and is at the heart of the town's heritage, culture, and economy. The largest value of catch in England and Wales is landed at Brixham. Along with quays to land catches, there is a thriving fish market.



There are significant opportunities in fishing – to increase capacity, double the size of the fish market, and create more sustainable jobs. The fishing sector has seen growth in the value of catch of 79% between 2011 and 2021 with employment growing by 19% in the last 5 years.

Brixham Harbour has reached its capacity to deal with fish landing and processing. Investing the port infrastructure enables the sector to capitalise on growth opportunities and create more sustainable employment. This will enhance Brixham's position and reputation as a port, preserving and promoting the area's culture. The fishing industry in Brixham will be more economically sustainable with greater critical mass of activity ensuring that all the trades and skills essential in supporting and supplying the industry remain in place.

Electronics and Photonics Innovation Centre and Production Park

EPIC, Torbay's Electronics and Photonics Innovation Centre, opened in 2019 to support the needs of Torbay's thriving microelectronics and photonics cluster. The £8 million centre is home to 13 businesses, each of which is an innovator in its field.

The facility has attracted three foreign-owned companies that have chosen to grow their UK operations in Torbay. In addition to modern surroundings and facilities, EPIC offers its businesses access to over £3 million worth of equipment, enabling them to penetrate new markets. The facilities are used to serve clients in the aerospace and MedTech sectors.

Innovative businesses are growing fast, and a strong identity is forming through both EPIC and the Torbay Hi-Tech Cluster – all helping to drive manufacturing and production and creating more high value jobs. This closely aligns with the government's Industrial Strategy, in particular the Advanced Manufacturing Sector Plan, which articulates the importance of these technologies in underpinning wider high-value supply chains.

Building on internationally recognised local expertise, investment will deliver new production and manufacturing facilities at Torbay Business Park. It will provide specialist production facilities enabling hi tech businesses to move from R&D into manufacturing and production, deepening innovation and enabling the growth of the sector and the attraction of inward investment.

The new electronics and photonics production park will bring 144 high value jobs and £6.8m of GVA per annum to Torbay.

While there are recruitment challenges across all sectors, South Devon College has co-designed with local businesses a new photonics degree. As the sector continues to grow, more degree level students will enter the local labour market raising the skills levels.

The benefits from increased collaboration will drive innovation and world class expertise – reinforcing the area's international reputation as a globally competitive location for electronics and photonics, ensuring retention and growth of existing businesses, and future investment both domestic and overseas.

Growth and opportunity in Devon

Devon's economic potential is shaped by its diverse geography, sectoral strengths, and institutional assets. Our model is designed to unlock this potential by aligning governance with the real patterns of economic activity and opportunity.

The Southern Devon unitary reflects the economic coherence of South Devon, where a Freeport, marine industries, photonics, and clean energy are already driving collaboration across boundaries. Torbay offers the internationally recognised Geopark, along with a tourism economy which provides a strong foundation for regeneration, while South Hams and West Devon offer opportunities for sustainable development and rural diversification. The existing joint planning arrangements between South Hams and West Devon demonstrate the benefits of coordinated growth strategies, which the new authority can build upon and scale.

In the north and east, the North unitary captures the dynamic interplay between Exeter's innovation economy and the surrounding districts' agricultural, tourism, and environmental sectors. The Greater Exeter area, with its science park, university, and transport links, acts as a catalyst for growth across Mid and East Devon in particular. The inclusion of Torridge and North Devon also brings into scope the Celtic Sea Floating Offshore Wind (FLOW) initiative, positioning the new authority to lead on renewable energy and green infrastructure. The North unitary will also bring together areas planning for strategic new settlements, with new towns and garden villages being brought forward in rural locations supporting local growth and the sustained and sustainable economic growth of Exeter.

North Devon building an active innovation ecosystem with partners including Exeter and Plymouth universities, leading businesses, government bodies, and The Crown Estate, aligning expertise and ambition to drive economic growth. This provides an opportunity to link together the education and skills across the Northern Devon unitary by joining up the university and the wider industry.

CASE STUDY

Freeport – Unlocking the defence dividend in South Hams and Plymouth

The ambition and outcomes were clear, the tangible benefits for businesses and residents realisable, but the road to secure the opportunity, garner collective support, embed transparent governance and ultimately deliver has been long, but is now starting to pay off: New infrastructure, sites being developed, green hydrogen production, Babcock Integrated Logistics Hub and Advanced Manufacturing Facility, skills programmes and job creation. All of this has been done across council geographies proving what we already know – arbitrary council boundaries do not block economic development or place-based policies.

Leveraging the advantages of a Joint Local Plan with Plymouth, an innovative interpretation of the Freeport prospectus, a "delivery without boundaries" attitude and a partnership of equals with Devon CC, Plymouth CC and South Hams District Council, we were able to deliver at incredible pace, a bid incorporating 3 sites, one port, multiple landowners, brown field regeneration and unlock a stalled strategic employment site to secure the only Freeport in the South West.

Hailed by DLUHC as the "innovation" Freeport, it has secured over £300m of investment across the public and private sector. A unique offer, with the public sector shouldering the burden and risk of infrastructure delivery to gear in private sector development, generate high skilled jobs and boost "South West PLC." The target sectors build on the green/blue economy and skills already established, marine, smart sound, autonomous vessels, defence, and low carbon.



With a strong governance model in place, the Council can shape the outcomes to ensure that they benefit the area and region, working closely with our partners, Plymouth City and Devon County Councils. It represents the largest economic development intervention and opportunity in South Hams and is embedded in our Council Plan. It is estimated that the Freeport will create 3,500 jobs across Plymouth and South Hams, together with enhancements to skills and infrastructure.

£3.5m Borrowing to support project delivery with a strong governance model in place

£300m Investment across public and private sector

"The Plymouth and South Devon Freeport is supercharging the South West economy by building on our region's unique national capabilities in marine, defence, and low carbon to form globally impactful clusters and a UK Innovation Superpower. Our outstanding location means the Freeport is prime for growing marine autonomy, renewables, and innovative businesses."

The Plymouth and South Devon Freeport has attracted new investment and provides supply chain opportunities, embedding our commitment to tackle climate change, deliver clean growth and marine decarbonisation.

It is providing innovation, investment, and infrastructure to build a more resilient, sustainable, and productive economy and upskill the local workforce for the high-quality future proof jobs the Freeport will bring."



Plymouth's continued autonomy supports its role as a regional economic anchor. With nationally significant assets such as Devonport Dockyard, the National Marine Park, and a thriving cultural sector, Plymouth is well placed to lead on defence, marine innovation, and urban regeneration. The city is currently benefitting from an unprecedented £4 billion investment in its defence sector, underpinning its critical role in national security and advanced manufacturing. Over the next five years, Plymouth will need to train and supply 25,000 skilled workers to meet the demands of Babcock and its extensive supply chain, reinforcing its status as a powerhouse for employment and skills development. While the Plymouth stands as a dynamic economic anchor, the proposed Southern Devon unitary provides a vital counterbalance, ensuring that the region functions holistically as a place to work and live. This balanced approach demonstrates that Plymouth can thrive as a standalone authority within its existing footprint, or with only modest expansion (4-5-1+), without the need for wholesale boundary changes.

Together, the three authorities created by our model offer a balanced and future-ready platform for economic development. Each has the scale to attract investment and deliver strategic infrastructure, while retaining the local knowledge and flexibility needed to respond and develop strategies which are specific to the needs of their communities.

CASE STUDY

Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone — accelerating clean growth

Context

East Devon faced the challenge of supporting economic growth, alongside ambitious housing delivery, while ensuring sustainable development. Delivery of employment space was lagging behind the delivery of housing, with businesses increasing seeking modern flexible commercial space with excellent connectivity, close to workforce.

Approach

The Exeter & East Devon Enterprise Zone (EEDEZ) was established to tackle these challenges through a partnership led initiative involving East Devon District

Council and Devon County Council, along with the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership. Through the designation 100% of business rates are retained to be invested in EZ. The EZ comprises of four complementary sites located strategically on the edge of Exeter, benefitting from excellent transport links, proximity to Cranbrook (a growing town with new housing), and easy access to countryside and the coast.

Key features include:

- Targeted investment in infrastructure. This includes a £4.5 million road enhancement at Exeter Airport's Long Lane was completed in February 2023. That enables development of an 8-hectare site known as Power Park, which is expected to create ~500 jobs.
- Simplified planning to accelerate development, with Local Development Orders being developed for the four sites.
- A "Zero Carbon Grant Fund" (coming soon) to support demonstrator and challenger projects aimed at reducing carbon emissions.

Key learning

While full impact metrics are still emerging, there are many examples of positive progress:

- The EZ's setup has helped attract businesses focused on clean growth. This includes the first net-zero carbon hotel, Voco Zeal Exeter Science Park, opened in 2025, with Passivhaus standards, ultra-low energy, renewable energy and sustainable materials.
- The EZ has secured investment to deliver commercial space in Cranbrook Town Centre, with £1.9m secured from the Devon and Torbay's transition to a net-zero economy fund. This will enable the investment of modular space in the growing town centre.

This model could be extended or replicated across Devon, especially where strategic housing sites are being delivered close to strategic employment sites.

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CASE STUDY

Collaborative response to the Flybe collapse in East Devon

In March 2020, the collapse of Flybe, the UK's largest regional airline, sent shockwaves through East Devon's economy. Headquartered at Exeter Airport, Flybe directly employed 931 individuals locally, spanning engineering, administration, and flight crew, and supported an additional 620 supply chain jobs. The airline contributed approximately £98.5 million annually to the regional economy and accounted for 78% of Exeter Airport's air traffic.

Its closure not only resulted in over 1,000 immediate job losses but also threatened the viability of Exeter Airport and the broader regional ecosystem, including tourism, logistics, and professional services. The timing of the collapse, just weeks before the COVID-19 lockdown, compounded the crisis. Recognising the scale of the threat, East Devon District Council (EDDC) and partners

including Exeter City Council, Devon County Council, Exeter College, the Heart of the South West LEP, and Exeter Airport mobilised a rapid, cross-boundary response. This partnership exemplified agile and innovative public sector collaboration.

Immediate support measures

Within days, a major jobs fair was convened by Exeter City Council and held at Exeter Corn Exchange, attracting hundreds of former Flybe staff and over 50 employers including BT, NHS, Ikea, and the University of Exeter. Additional fairs in Axminster, Torquay, and Honiton ensured regional accessibility. Support services included CV writing, career advice, financial guidance, and retraining opportunities. Jobcentre Plus activated its Rapid Response Service, while Exeter College prioritised displaced apprentices and students.

Strategic economic interventions

To safeguard regional assets, Devon County Council acquired Flybe's Training Academy, which was then transformed by Exeter College into the Future Skills Centre. This preserved

vital aviation and engineering training infrastructure, supporting both immediate reskilling and long-term workforce development. Through the Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone designation, EDDC and DCC also invested £4.5m in the upgrading of transport infrastructure adjacent to the Airport to unlock the development of a strategic employment site and promote inward investment. EDDC also provided grant support to Exeter Aerospace, a start-up company providing maintenance, repair and overhaul services from the hangars located by Flybe.

A stakeholder group comprising representatives of the Airport, local authorities, South West Business Council and Exeter College continues to meet. This has helped to provide strategic support for the Airport, including bringing forward proposals for a Future Flight Innovation Zone in partnership with the Civil Aviation Authority. The Airport has now seen a trial of hybrid-electric flight and hosted the UK's first zero-carbon aircraft turnaround in April 2025, using hydrogen-powered ground support equipment for a TUI Boeing 737.

Outcomes and legacy

The coordinated response significantly mitigated the human and economic impact. Hundreds of staff accessed support, with many securing interviews and employment within days. Exeter College's repurposing of the Flybe Training Academy ensured continuity in high-tech skills development, including aerospace and engineering, while strategic lobbying helped preserve key air routes critical to business and tourism. The Flybe collapse was a major economic shock for East Devon, but the swift, collaborative response demonstrated the region's resilience and capacity for innovation. By aligning local authorities, educational institutions, and employers, the partnership not only supported displaced workers but also laid the foundation for long-term economic recovery and growth. This case stands as a model for cross-boundary crisis response and strategic economic planning.

Embracing the economic growth opportunity through a Mayoral Strategic Authority

The proposed configuration supports the development of a strategic governance framework that enables all three future unitaries to engage effectively with a future Mayoral Strategic Authority. By creating three unitary authorities with balanced populations and economic profiles, our model provides a clear structure for regional coordination and representation. This has the potential to seamlessly extend across the wider peninsular to include Cornwall which is of equivalent scale. All eleven councils in Devon have recently written to government indicating support for advancing toward a full Mayoral Strategic Authority, initially encompassing Devon and Torbay, with a long-term goal of incorporating Cornwall into the Peninsula.

Each authority is grounded in a coherent economic geography, allowing for focused leadership on growth, infrastructure, and skills. The North unitary can lead on innovation and rural development in the north and east, the South unitary on coastal regeneration and clean energy in the south, and Plymouth on marine industries and urban transformation. This division of strategic responsibilities supports a collaborative approach to regional development, while ensuring that each area retains the autonomy to pursue its own priorities.

Our model also enables the creation of joint committees and governance mechanisms that reflect the realities of place and partnership. By aligning with existing travel-to-work areas, housing markets, and sectoral clusters, our configuration provides a strong foundation for integrated planning and delivery across the county.

In this way, our model not only supports local leadership but also strengthens geographic Devon's position within national devolution agendas. It creates the conditions for effective engagement with government, investors, and regional partners, ensuring that the county can speak with a unified voice and deliver on its economic ambitions, and avoids the dramatic imbalances inherent with some alternative models.

Growth opportunities across the unitary areas

Our model is designed to reflect the real economic geographies of Devon, enabling each new authority to pursue growth strategies that are tailored to their unique assets and challenges. Rather than imposing artificial boundaries, our model builds on existing economic relationships, infrastructure corridors, and sectoral strengths to create a platform for inclusive and sustainable development.

The Southern Devon unitary brings together South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay, and West Devon — areas that already share strong economic, social, and environmental ties. This geography reflects the reality of shared labour markets, travel-to-work patterns, and sectoral interdependencies. Torbay's coastal economy, anchored by its UNESCO Global Geopark and thriving tourism sector, is closely linked to the wider South Devon area through shared infrastructure, housing markets, and environmental assets. The marine, photonics, and clean energy sectors that span South Hams and Teignbridge are already collaborating across boundaries, and the Freeport initiative demonstrates the potential for place-based economic development that transcends traditional administrative lines.

The new Southern authority would be well placed to develop a coherent strategy for coastal regeneration, rural diversification, and sustainable tourism. It would also be able to build on the successful joint planning arrangements already in place between South Hams and West Devon, which have enabled more flexible responses to housing and employment needs. By consolidating these areas into a single unitary, our model supports more effective use of land, better coordination of investment, and stronger alignment with regional infrastructure and skills strategies.

Our proposed Northern Devon unitary, bringing together Exeter with the districts of East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge, captures the gravitational pull of Exeter as a regional employment and innovation hub, while also recognising the distinct contributions of the

surrounding rural and coastal areas. The inclusion of Exeter ensures that the benefits of city-led growth—such as access to higher-value employment, research institutions, and transport connectivity—can be more evenly distributed across the wider geography. At the same time, the rural districts bring their own economic strengths, including advanced manufacturing, agriculture, food production, and environmental stewardship, which are increasingly important in the context of green growth and natural capital investment. The significant number of SMEs in the Northern Devon unitary can benefit from the innovation infrastructure established in Exeter.

The Northern Devon unitary also creates a strong foundation for strategic investment in emerging and high-growth sectors. The greater Exeter area, anchored by its science park and university-led innovation ecosystem, is well positioned to accelerate digital, environmental, and life sciences industries. Further north, the Celtic Sea Floating Offshore Wind (FLOW) initiative presents a major opportunity for Torridge and North Devon to establish themselves as national leaders in renewable energy. In addition, the recent takeover and significant investment by Navantia in Appledore Shipyard (formerly Harland & Wolff) is revitalising the region's shipbuilding and defence sector, with a notable increase in skilled apprenticeships and employment opportunities. By bringing these areas together within a single authority, our model enables coordinated planning, targeted infrastructure delivery, and focused skills development to support and sustain these ambitious growth sectors.

Plymouth, as the "1" in our model, retains its status as a standalone urban authority. This reflects its distinct economic role as a centre for defence, marine industries, and higher education, as well as its existing capacity to deliver integrated services at scale. Plymouth's partnerships with South Hams and the wider South West demonstrate the benefits of focused, place-based economic strategies, and its continued autonomy within the new structure ensures that its strengths can be leveraged for the benefit of the wider region.

Together, the three authorities created by our model offer a balanced and future-ready platform for economic growth. Each has the scale to attract investment and deliver strategic infrastructure, while retaining the local knowledge and flexibility needed to respond to the specific needs of their communities. By aligning governance with real economic geographies, our model enables Devon to unlock their full potential—driving innovation, supporting inclusive growth, and ensuring that prosperity is shared across urban, rural, and coastal areas alike.

The housing and homelessness challenge in Devon

Devon faces a complex and evolving housing landscape, shaped by a combination of affordability pressures, uneven delivery, and rising homelessness. The county's mix of urban centres, coastal towns, and deeply rural areas presents distinct challenges in both affordability, supply and access, as evidenced in the Devon Housing Commission.

In areas such as Exeter, South Hams, and Teignbridge, high demand has driven up prices and constrained availability, particularly for younger residents and key workers. Coastal zones experience seasonal pressures and a high prevalence of second-home ownership, while rural districts such as Torridge and North Devon face underinvestment and slower housing growth despite clear local need. These variations are compounded by fragmented governance, which has limited the ability to plan strategically across housing market areas and respond consistently to emerging challenges.

Homelessness rates vary significantly across the county, with urban centres such as Exeter and Torbay reporting higher levels of rough sleeping and temporary accommodation use. Rural homelessness, often less visible, is also increasing, exacerbated by limited access to support services and emergency housing. The current two-tier system fragments responsibility for housing strategy, planning, and homelessness prevention, leading to inconsistent approaches and missed opportunities for coordinated action.



The Housing Delivery Test results and homelessness metrics highlight disparities in performance and capacity across districts. Some areas consistently underdeliver against targets, while others struggle to manage demand despite meeting supply benchmarks. This unevenness undermines the county's ability to respond strategically to housing need and to support vulnerable residents effectively.

Why this unitary model delivers on housing and homelessness

Our model offers a more coherent and strategic framework for addressing housing and homelessness across Devon. By consolidating governance into three unitary authorities, our model enables integrated planning, streamlined delivery, and more consistent support for residents.

The South unitary, encompassing South Devon and Torbay, reflects a coherent geography with shared challenges in affordability, seasonal housing pressures, and coastal deprivation. Joint planning arrangements already in place between South Hams and West Devon provide a foundation for integrated housing strategies, which can be scaled to include Torbay and Teignbridge. This supports more effective use of land, better coordination of infrastructure, and stronger alignment with local needs. Both proposed unitary areas have experience in delivering new towns – Cranbrook and Sherford

– the latter being a case study considered by the government’s New Towns Task Force and an exemplary example of creating new communities, not housing estates. Cross boundary working through the Joint Local Plan between Plymouth, South Hams and West Devon has ensured that Plymouth has been able to grow outside of its boundary, while ensuring the sensitivities of rural development are protected. It is essential that governance geographies reflect the housing challenge, as urban development approaches don’t work in rural settings, but strategic collaboration does.

The North unitary brings together areas with shared housing market dynamics and infrastructure corridors. Exeter’s role as a regional employment and education hub creates pressure on housing supply, which can be better managed through coordinated spatial planning across East, Mid, and North Devon. A first new town in East Devon started development in 2011 and a second due to commence in the late 2020s. The associated step change in housing delivery married to the large-scale provision of new employment opportunities has helped to significantly improve overall housing affordability in the district. The model also brings together all current stock-retaining councils within the new North unitary area, maximising

the opportunities for economies of scale, operational synergy, and accelerating the delivery of additional social housing via council housebuilding. The inclusion of Torridge and North Devon also enables targeted investment in areas with historically low delivery, aligning housing growth with economic development strategies such as the Celtic Sea Floating Offshore Wind initiative.

Plymouth’s retention as a standalone unitary allows it to continue leading on urban regeneration and housing delivery, while maintaining partnerships with neighbouring authorities. Its existing capacity and strategic planning frameworks complement the wider regional approach enabled by our model. This also recognises Plymouth’s ambition to build 10,000 new homes in the city centre – a “town in a city”, through a partnership with Homes England.

By aligning governance with real housing market areas and service footprints, our model supports more equitable resource allocation, improved outcomes for residents, and a stronger foundation for tackling homelessness. It enables each authority to develop tailored strategies that reflect local conditions, while benefiting from the scale and resilience of larger organisational structures.

But the impact of that funding is then even more wide-reaching. From the household savings of up to £748 per year through to the local supply chain impact of over £1.2m of direct investment into the local economy. With 12 apprenticeships also being supported as a result the programme created an estimated £4m economic boost, further buoyed by both health benefits for residents and an estimated 29 tonnes of carbon emissions saved per year – equivalent to the amount absorbed by over 260 mature trees.

Westward have then been able to redirect saved capital and enter into contract on 46 new affordable homes across 2 sites in Bideford and Winkleigh (29 homes at social rent & 17 for Shared Ownership). At a time of housing need the model demonstrates the true impact of partnerships to make a difference to people’s lives.

CASE STUDY

A retrofit programme with genuine impact

A 2025 retrofit and affordable housing programme delivered by Westward Housing, funded by the Torridge Community Regeneration Partnership with MHCLG, demonstrates the opportunity to invest for genuine all-round benefit and long-term impact to achieve collective goals.

The £1,515,000 funding itself enabled Westward to invest in retro fitting 113 homes to increase energy efficiency and bring the homes from current EPC ratings of D–G up to EPC C or higher, including 20 of the homes becoming EPC A.

CASE STUDY

Zed Pods

With the pressing challenges of housing affordability, net zero ambitions, and regeneration, Mid Devon District Council, in partnership with Zed Pods, is advancing the delivery of high-quality, zero-carbon, and cost-effective homes. Through the adoption of modern construction techniques, innovation is being introduced not only in the building process but also in the daily experience of tenants. These homes incorporate environmental and smart technologies, including environmental monitoring systems that provide data on air quality and temperature, offering reassurance to residents.

By aligning in-depth knowledge of local housing requirements with Zed Pods’ expertise in modular construction, award-winning outcomes are being achieved to the benefit of tenants, communities, and the environment. As of September 2025, three sites, Shapland Place in Tiverton, St Andrews in Cullompton, and Crofts Estate in Sandford, have been completed. This approach has enabled the transformation of challenging brownfield and underused sites, such as former garage plots, across Mid Devon, facilitating the regeneration of existing estates in ways that traditional construction methods may not allow.



Recognising that high energy costs present a significant barrier for many households, Zed Pod homes are designed to deliver outstanding energy efficiency, helping to lower running expenses for tenants. When combined with social rent levels, this provides a route to true affordability and enhances the financial security and sustainability of tenancies for local families. Additional sites are currently in progress, with modules recently delivered at Eastlands in Hemyock and School Close in Bampton.



Complementary housing profiles and challenges in this unitary model

Our proposed 4-5-1 model provides a framework for more coherent and responsive housing governance. Our model enables each new unitary authority new opportunities to take a strategic view of housing need, delivery, and infrastructure planning. The North unitary, encompassing Exeter and the northern districts, brings together two distinct housing market areas which nevertheless share many of the same challenges. Exeter's role as a regional employment and education hub creates pressure on housing supply, which can be better managed through coordinated planning across a wider sub-region including East and Mid Devon. This also brings together four stockholding authorities, offering the potential for new and innovative models of delivery. The inclusion of Torridge and North Devon also enables targeted investment in areas with historically low delivery, supporting regeneration and linking housing growth to wider economic strategies such as the Celtic Sea Floating Offshore Wind initiative. Existing partnership working is reflective of these places, with joint plans across Torridge and North Devon, a shared Building Control Partnership across North and Mid Devon, and joint infrastructure assessment across Mid, Exeter and East Devon – alongside the shared strategic growth expertise in East and Mid Devon.

The South unitary, covering South Devon and Torbay, reflects a coherent geography with common challenges in affordability, seasonal housing demand, and coastal deprivation. Existing joint planning arrangements between South Hams and West Devon provide a foundation for integrated housing strategies, which can be extended to include Torbay and Teignbridge. This supports more effective use of land, better coordination of infrastructure, and stronger alignment with local needs.

Our model also enables a more joined-up approach to homelessness prevention and supported housing. Under the current system, responsibility is split across tiers, leading to both duplication and gaps in service. A unitary structure allows for clearer accountability, improved data sharing, and better integration

with health and social care. Opportunities for innovation—such as modular housing, repurposing of temporary accommodation, and community-led development—can be scaled across the new authorities, supported by shared expertise and consistent standards.

By recognising the housing opportunities across Devon unlocked through reorganisation and consolidating governance into three strategic authorities, our model creates the conditions for more equitable, efficient, and locally responsive housing delivery with the ability to meet growth targets.

Efficient and locally focused democratic arrangements

Our model introduces a streamlined and accountable democratic structure that reflects the scale and diversity of Devon's communities. By replacing the current two-tier system with three unitary authorities—two newly formed and one retained—this model simplifies governance while strengthening local representation.

Each new authority will be designed to ensure effective democratic oversight, with councillor numbers and ward boundaries informed by national research and Boundary Commission guidance. Indicative councillor-to-population ratios have been developed to strike a balance between efficiency and accessibility, ensuring that residents continue to have meaningful representation without unnecessary duplication. This approach will result in a net reduction in the total number of elected members across Devon, while maintaining strong local accountability.

Our model places localism at the heart of governance by proposing the establishment of Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) and Local Community Networks (LCNs), each with distinct roles. We will work with residents and their locally elected Town and Parish representatives and councils to find the best way that NACs and LCNs can work for them. NACs will have delegated powers, enabling genuine decision-making at the most local

level and building on the strengths of existing town and parish councils to shape services and priorities. LCNs, meanwhile, will bring together stakeholders, including ward members, town and parish councils, the police, health partners, and others, covering identifiable geographies or communities to address place-based issues, potentially with access to funding, but without formal delegated powers. Participatory budgeting and devolved funding arrangements will further empower communities to influence how resources are allocated in their area. By linking these local structures to regional strategic partnerships, such as the collaborative approach showcased by Northern Devon Futures, we can ensure that local voices are connected to broader cross-sector initiatives, strengthening both local and regional arrangements.

The new unitaries will learn from recent experience from Somerset and further afield on embedding successful community networks in the unitary change context. Sessions have already been held with parishes in areas adjoining Somerset to hear from towns and parishes about what worked well and what could be improved. The Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) has attended these in

order to be well-placed as a productive and enabling partner for communities to strengthen local governance as part of the unitarisation of principal authorities. These will be supported by modern democratic services, including digital platforms for engagement, streamlined electoral processes, and enhanced support for councillors. These improvements will ensure that governance is not only more efficient, but also more transparent, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of residents.

Alongside community governance reviews where necessary across the towns and parishes, special attention will also be paid to ensuring the legacy of historic civic positions such as the Lord Mayor of Exeter. Exeter is currently unparished, and our proposal will seek to ensure that all areas have access to the appropriate form of (hyper) local governance, while protecting and preserving the civic status of our historic cities.

We are proposing indicative councillor numbers totalling 234 across Devon – 83 for Southern Devon, 94 for Northern Devon, and 57 for Plymouth. Additional detail can be found in the section addressing **Criteria 6** [to be ratified post-Leaders' approval].

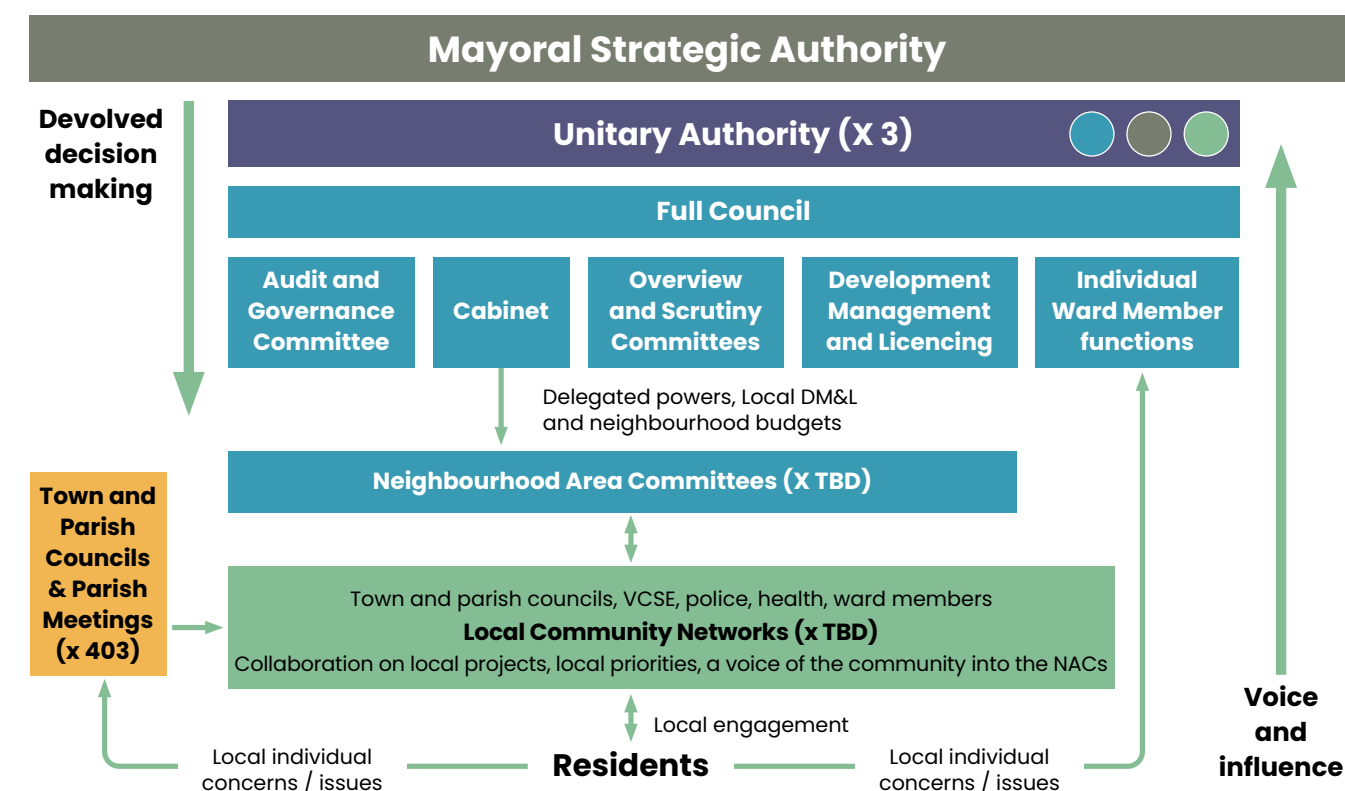


Figure: Model showing the future relationship between the resident and governance structures

CASE STUDY

Community Economic Plans – Cutting through layers of government to support the community

Following the district elections in May 2023, South Hams committed itself to community engagement and developed a new Council Plan. A key aspect was to reinvigorate meetings between the five main towns and district leaders and embark on a programme of facilitated engagement to support our towns. The layers of local government were seen as a blocker to effective place strategy, targeted funding, and community support at a town level.

Trust levels had previously been low, and historic engagement weak, yet the fundamentals were strong: good local place leadership, dynamic town councils, neighbourhood plans, and a sense of community. What was needed was a new approach: ground-up, facilitated, empowered, funded, and long-term.

This led to the creation of the Community Economic Plans (CEP) Programme, which now encompasses five towns and is being replicated in West Devon.

Ivybridge, the first CEP, has been developed through a truly impactful collaboration with the Town Council, building on their in-depth understanding of local challenges and opportunities, culminating with the Town Council adopting the plan on behalf of its residents. It has created clarity, empowered the community, and aligned the funding environment to deliver the town's aspirations. In parallel, significant Section 106 and other grant funding has been awarded to the town to support local community organisations and facilitate business growth. Some of this funding resulted from the CEP consultation with the town, its businesses, community groups, and residents.



Section 106 Funding:

- **Ivybridge Bowls Club:** £10,000 for a new mower, water pop-up system, and paving/path improvements.
- **Ivybridge Cricket Club:** £200,000 for clubhouse extension and improvements.
- **Ivybridge Rugby Club:** £150,000 for floodlighting and clubhouse extension.
- **Ivybridge Football Club:** £257,800 for clubhouse upgrades and floodlighting.
- **Manstow Football Club:** £30,000 for car parking and clubhouse/changing facility.
- **Skate South Devon:** £200,000 for a pump park and community building.
- **South Devon Tennis Centre:** £100,000 for court coverage and renovations.
- **Total in principle allocations:** £947,800.

Projects including Skate South Devon had engaged with the public directly through our CEP consultation to demonstrate support for their activities.

Examples of Rural England Prosperity Fund Grants in the Town

- **Ivybridge Brewing Company:** Funding to expand activities and support people with learning disabilities.
- **Ivybridge Rail Users Group:** £20,000 for engineers' drawings to extend Ivybridge Railway Station.
- **Signpost / The Methodist Church / Local Foodbank:** £10,000 for a new kitchen facility to support vulnerable residents.

These grants were applied for due to the CEP work identifying needs and creating links between organisations and the Council. The CEP process created an evidence base to support these projects and fostered better collaborative working. Further projects are in the pipeline for the next 12 months.

Effective governance and decision making at each level

Our model introduces a governance framework that is both streamlined and responsive, enabling effective decision making across three distinct levels: neighbourhood, unitary authority, and strategic regional coordination. This structure replaces the complexity of the current two-tier system with a single tier of local government that is better aligned to the realities of place, service delivery, and economic geography.

At the local level, our model embeds neighbourhood governance through the ability to use mechanisms such as Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) and Local Community Networks (LCNs). These structures will provide formal channels for community input, local decision making, and participatory budgeting. They will build on the strengths of existing town and parish councils, enabling more direct engagement with residents and ensuring that services reflect local priorities. This approach supports subsidiarity, placing decision making as close to communities as possible while maintaining strategic coherence.

At the unitary level, each new authority will be empowered to lead on service delivery, strategic planning, and place-based transformation. Governance arrangements will be designed to ensure clarity of roles, accountability, and effective oversight. Councillor numbers and ward boundaries will be informed by national guidance and local consultation, ensuring that representation is proportionate and accessible reflecting the distinctive needs and interests of both rural and urban communities. The scale of the new authorities allows for stronger organisational capacity, more resilient leadership, and the ability to attract and retain skilled staff. This supports consistent service standards, integrated commissioning, and the development of strategic partnerships across health, education, housing, and infrastructure.

At the regional level, our configuration provides a clear and balanced structure for engagement with a future Mayoral Strategic Authority. Each unitary is grounded in a coherent economic geography, enabling focused leadership on growth, infrastructure, and skills. The North unitary can lead on innovation including rural development in the north and east, the South unitary on coastal regeneration and clean energy in the south, and Plymouth on marine industries and urban transformation. This division of strategic responsibilities supports collaborative regional development while preserving local autonomy.

Our model also enables the creation of joint committees and governance mechanisms that reflect functional geographies, such as travel-to-work areas, housing markets, and sectoral clusters. This supports integrated planning and delivery across the county, ensuring that strategic initiatives are coordinated and locally grounded.

By aligning governance with the lived experience of communities and the operational realities of service delivery, our model creates a platform for effective decision making at every level. It replaces fragmentation with coherence, enabling Devon to speak with a unified voice in national policy discussions while remaining rooted in the needs of its localities.



Town Quay Bridge, Newton Abbot, Teignbridge

Criteria 2:

Efficiency, capacity and withstanding financial shocks

Our proposed 4-5-1 model for Devon is designed to enhance efficiency, organisational capacity, and financial stability. By serving substantial populations within each authority, our model promotes streamlined management, integrated budgeting, and centralised procurement, particularly for high-impact areas such as IT, highways, and social care. Dedicated transformation teams and unified planning ensure services are tailored to local needs and adapted to deliver long-term savings. Our structure encourages strong local relationships and provides a robust foundation to withstand financial shocks. Our model produces £77.1 million of annual savings, rising to £124.5 million in the stretch case, and projects a payback period within 2 years and 9 months.

Criteria two focuses on the ability for an option to increase efficiency, financial capacity and withstand financial shocks. According to guidance provided by the government, there are four key areas that we address throughout this section:

Criteria 2a	The right population size for the area
Criteria 2b	Improving council finances through efficiencies
Criteria 2c	Managing transition costs and enabling transformation
Criteria 2e	Managing council debt

Note: We have assessed that criteria 2d: 'For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable' is not applicable here.

This is on the basis that Devon County Council, nor any of the existing district councils in the present two-tier area or the existing unitary authority, Torbay Council are under Best Value Interventions or receiving Exceptional Financial Support. Whilst Plymouth Council has sought Exceptional Financial Support for a historic accounting error from 2019/20, under the preferred option, they would continue to remain as a sovereign unitary authority.

Cranbrook, East Devon

Background, context and financial viability

Local authorities across England are facing unprecedented pressures from demand on services and uncertainty of funding. Councils across Devon are no exception and are projecting a region wide budget gap of £163.6 million to 2028/29 (based on published budget data) whilst contending with rising demand for adult social care and children’s services, alongside inflationary pressures that are increasing overall operating costs.

The two-tier system in part of the region exacerbates these financial challenges by maintaining parallel teams, separate IT platforms, and duplicated back-office functions, which diverts resources away from frontline services.

In Devon, the region currently has two Unitary councils, being Torbay and Plymouth, with Devon County Council and eight district authorities providing services in a two-tier structure for the rest of Devon. The 4-5-1 model retains a structure of three upper-tier councils within Devon but reconfigures these to better reflect the needs of different parts of the county and provides unitary local government across the whole county. Such an approach avoids unnecessary duplication of key services, while gaining economies of scale from clustering district and smaller unitary functions into sensible sized units – avoiding the imbalance of having any councils under 250k or over 700k, as per government guidance.



Criteria 2a The right population size for the area

Core funding and financial viability

An analysis of estimated funding in the region leads us to conclude that **Option C: 4-5-1 is financially viable** when looked at in relation to the split of population for the three proposed unitary authorities.

The split of the population (1.2million population in total for Devon) between the two new proposed Unitaries fundamentally meets the Government’s criteria set out in the White Paper that new Unitary population sizes should be around 500,000 population size.

Plymouth City Council (an existing Unitary Council) would remain on its own existing boundary with a population size of around

269,000. The Government has indicated that lower population sizes around the 300,000 level would also be acceptable in some circumstances. Plymouth’s key strategic role as a hub for national defence infrastructure clearly makes that argument categorically.

Our three-unitary, 4-5-1 model serves populations of around 269,000 to 547,000 each, aiming for greater efficiency and improvement while staying connected to communities. Our proposal recommends three unitaries under our 4-5-1 model as the most sustainable structure, supporting financial stability, economic growth, and high-quality services in line with public sector reform.

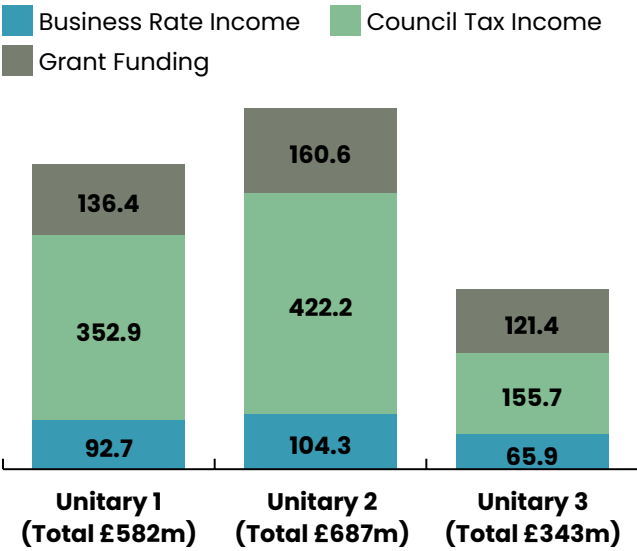
	Unitary 1 – ‘4’ (Southern Unitary)	Unitary 2 – ‘5’ (Northern Unitary)	Unitary 3 – ‘1’ (Plymouth)
Unitary Composition	South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon	East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon and Torridge.	Plymouth
Population (% of total population)	426,155 (34%)	546,738 (44%)	268,736 (22%)
Total Estimated Core Funding (£’m) (% of overall funding for all Devon Councils)	582.0 (36%)	687.1 (43%)	343.0 (21%)

Ensuring funding is proportional to the population projection

As the table on the previous page shows, resources and population are equally balanced in each of the 3 Unitaries which are being recommended under this proposal.

Using independent analysis from Pixel Financial Management (LGR funding model Fair Funding Review 2.0 – August 2025), the breakdown of projected core funding (Retained Business Rates, Council Tax income and Grant Funding from Government e.g. Revenue Support Grant) is shown below.

Breakdown of Projected Core Funding £'m



Source: Pixel Financial Management – LGR Funding Model FFR2.0, August 2025

The diagram above shows the split of the core funding between the three Unitaries within the 4-5-1 model.

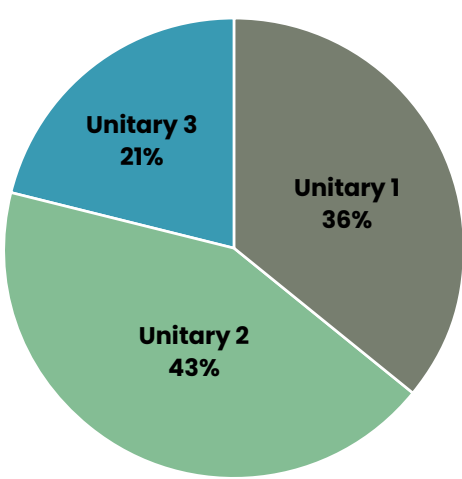
In addition, there would be some specific grants that sit outside of the core spending power analysis such as Dedicated Schools Grant that are in addition to these figures.

Across all three unitaries of the 4-5-1 model, estimated funding is proportional to the population split and all three unitaries are equally balanced.

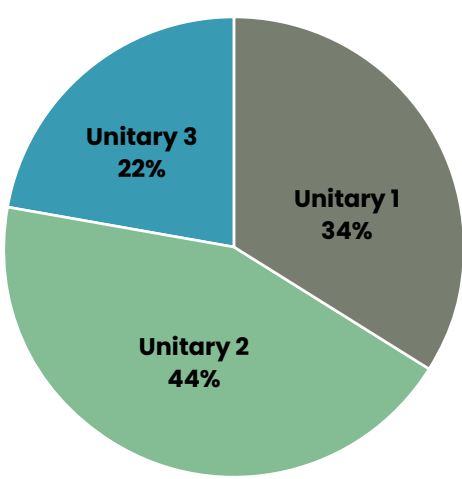
Taking the above projections of Core Funding for the three proposed unitaries under Option C: 4-5-1 and comparing to the split of population in the regions shows that estimated funding is proportional to the population split as shown below:

For example, the Southern Unitary (Unitary 1 – South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon) would have 36% of the core funding across all Devon Councils and 34% of the Devon population split.

Shares of Core Funding



Population Split



Source: Pixel Financial Management – LGR Funding Model FFR2.0 (August 2025) and ONS

Assessment Metric	Southern	Northern	Plymouth	Total
Population (Current)	426,155	546,738	268,736	1,241,629
%	34%	44%	22%	100%
Population (2040)	471,674	627,074	279,652	1,378,399
%	34%	45%	20%	100%

Population growth

Option C: 4-5-1 proposes a structure that creates a balanced population across each unitary within the region of Devon based on current population and remain balanced based on the projected population growth to 2040, as shown above.

The current guidance from MHCLG suggests a population of around 500,000 for establishing new unitary authorities. Our future projections estimate that the populations in all three of the proposed unitary authorities under Option C (4-5-1) will continue to grow according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS). For the two newly created unitary authorities, the Southern unitary will reach 471,674 residents by 2040 and in the Northern unitary, the population will rise to 627,074. The projected population of all three proposed unitary councils is deemed to be proportionate and manageable for sustainable growth.

Key features of the 4-5-1 model to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks include:

- Each authority manages its budget end-to-end.
- Centralised procurement for IT, highways, and social care.
- Enhanced transformation teams deliver tailored service redesign and savings.
- Unified capital and revenue planning focuses on local needs.
- Strong local relationships foster integrated services and capacity building.
- Balanced unitary authorities promote supplier market competitiveness.
- Unitary structures support growth in major industries through focused local interventions.
- Improved democratic representation with streamlined councillor numbers.
- Organisational size matches service delivery for operational efficiency.
- Rationalised property and fleet portfolios align assets with community objectives and environmental goals.
- Enhanced customer contact, including digital self-service channels, improves engagement and satisfaction.

Unlike excessively large unitary models, our approach of the 4-5-1 model balances financial efficiency with responsiveness and supports specialised local economies. Aligning unitaries with our distinct places enables targeted fiscal strategies, protects reserves, maintains accountability, and ensures vital services remain locally responsive.

Criteria 2b Improving council finances through efficiencies

The financial case

Our detailed financial case has been developed using publicly available sources of data as well as more tailored insights with input from S151 Officers. The data was verified with these officers to ensure accuracy and sound conclusions. This approach meant that for the preferred option being proposed, the positions of the individual proposed unitary authorities could be assessed to ensure balance and that no individual authority would be left with an unviable position that would adversely impact of their financial sustainability.

Under our preferred 4-5-1 option, the Southern, Northern and Plymouth unitary authorities will all drive efficiencies, capacity and wider public sector reform through more sustainable structures and having more distinct localised identities.

A high-level summary is set out below of the financial case which is presented in more detail in **section 5**.

Savings and efficiencies

Our financial case demonstrates that the ongoing savings from efficiencies that could be realised are £77.1 million in the base case and £124.5 million in the stretch case (where greater upfront investment yields larger transformational savings).

The estimated savings under our preferred 4-5-1 option represents 3.5% (base case) and 5.7% (stretch case) of actual net revenue expenditure which totals £2.2 billion in the region and these savings are assessed as achievable and balanced through reorganisation alone. These savings can be achieved by moving to the three unitary model which will enable savings to be realised quickly by having a clear break from previous authorities in the southern and northern unitary part of the model. This will necessitate new and dynamic leadership to drive the organisational culture change and the implementation of new ways of working required to achieve consistently high-quality service standards whilst keeping close control of budgets to drive organisational efficiency.

These efficiencies would be in addition to the quality improvements in services as outlined in **Criteria 3** of this document.

Implementation costs

Our analysis estimates that in the base case one -off implementation costs would total £73.9million.

In the stretch case where further transformation is carried out, one-off implementation costs are estimated to be £101.0 million.

In both of these cases, these one-off implementation costs are being driven largely by costs associated with right sizing the organisation. Since this option is reorganisation of existing districts and unitary authorities in the region as opposed to a restructure, there are no increased ongoing costs.

These one-off implementation costs across the Unitary Councils would initially offset the savings in the early years and are discussed in more detail in **section 5**.

Payback period

Our profiling of estimated savings and implementation costs projects that in the base case, the proposed unitary authorities would collectively reach break even in **2 years and 9 months**. In the stretched case, greater upfront investment to yield larger transformational savings mean that break even would be achieved in **2 years and 11 months** (the payback period is longer due to a higher level of upfront investment). In both cases, after this period, the estimated cumulative net savings would exceed the implementation costs.

Net benefit

After the breakeven point, in the base case, **the expected net benefit for the three proposed unitary authorities collectively would be £508.3 million by year 10 compared to £805.3 million in the stretched case**. These ongoing benefits gives the new authorities a sound financial basis to move forwards with renewed focus and investment in local public services.

Efficiencies through savings opportunities

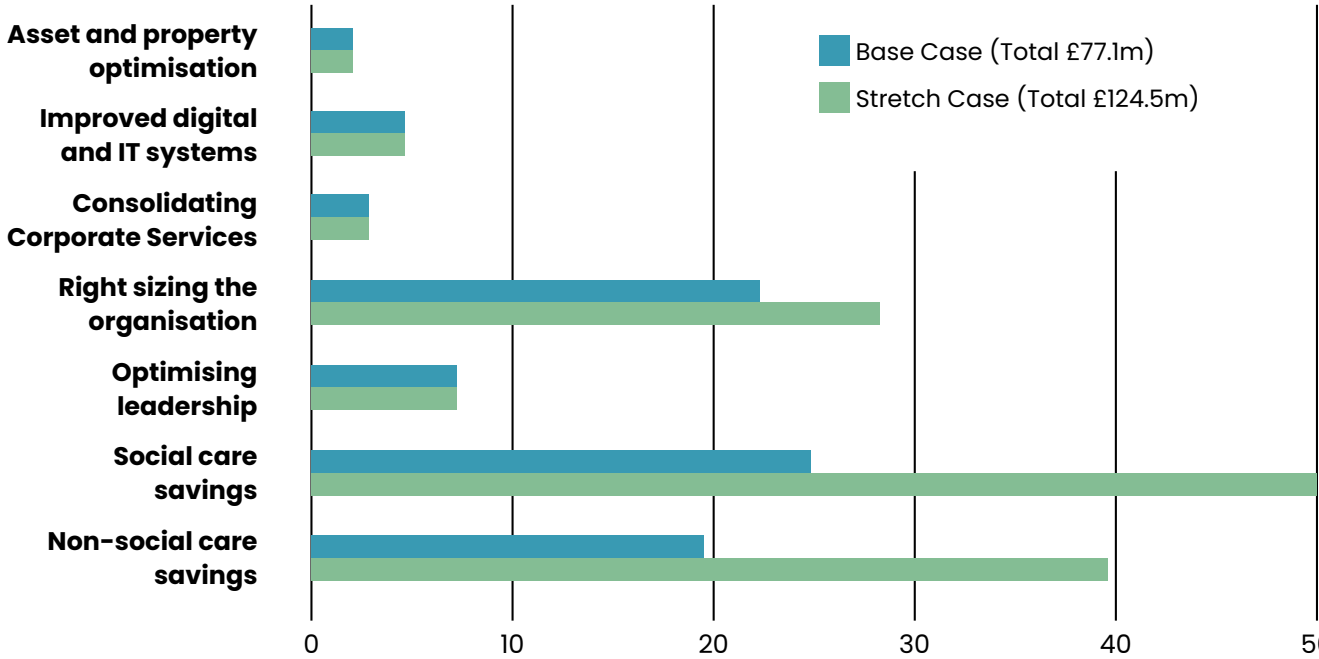
Our preferred option 4-5-1, projects opportunities from the reconfiguration of existing authorities to realise savings. These include efficiencies from streamlined leadership teams, consolidation of back-office functions and associated support services, a breakdown is shown below and includes total estimated savings from services:

In the stretch case, whilst there would be a higher level of upfront investment and transformation, this delivers a higher level of year on year savings of £124.5m as opposed to £77.1m.

Opportunities in social care

The scope of potential savings from efficiencies in social care which are achievable in the new 3 unitary authority configuration has been explored starting with a comparison of the actual spend on per head basis to the Government's latest assessment of relative needs for Adult Social Care (ASC) and Children's Social Care (CSC).

Breakdown of estimated savings for Base and Stretch Cases (£'m)



Adult social care

For Adult Social Care(ASC), this correlation between actual spend per head and ASC relative needs at a high-level indicates if an authority is spending at a level above their assessed need. The vertical distance above the 'line' indicates the level of savings which should be achievable just by working to an 'expected' standard of cost and performance. The graph below compares this assessment of spending level for adult social care for all County Councils in England and this suggests that Devon County Council is spending considerably above its assessed need which gives rise to the opportunity under LGR to explore efficiencies and savings.

In the 2023/24 financial year, Devon County Council was the second highest (spend per head of adult population) County Council on adult social care (£606.60 per head) out of the 21 County Councils in England as shown below.

Whilst Devon County Council are the second highest spend per head County Council, this is not due to how sparsely populated it is.

This is demonstrated by the fact that other sparsely populated counties such

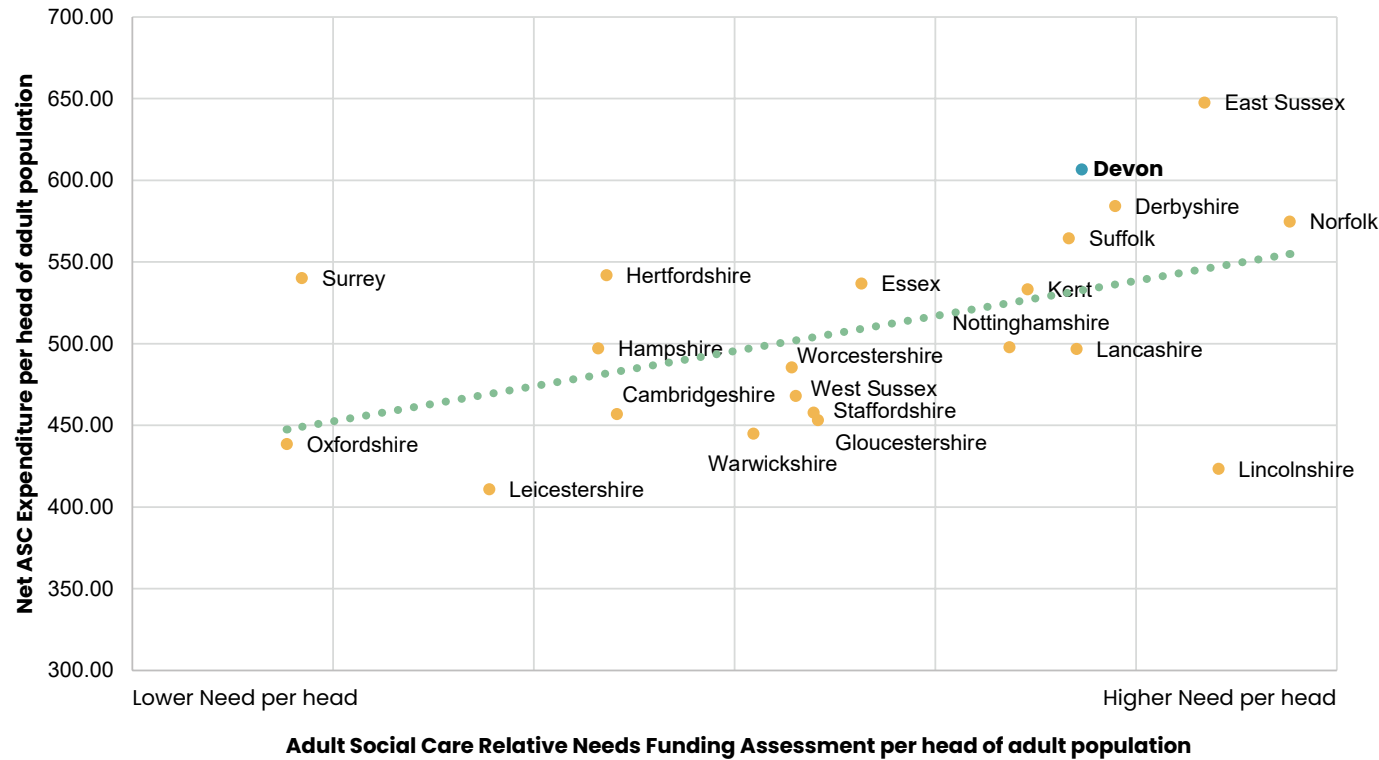
as Leicestershire and Lincolnshire spend significantly less per head on adult social care.

If Devon County Council were able to reduce their current spend per head (£606.60) to a level closer to Kent (£533.23), or even just closer to the national averages, it could potentially recognise significant revenue savings, after a transition period, of over £49m per annum. **This provides a further level of assurance that the estimated adult social care savings proposed under this 4-5-1 option of £15m per annum in the Base Case and £30m per annum in the Stretch Case are prudent and achievable.**

Lincolnshire (£423.35 per head) is a good comparison as the 'relative need' is similar to Devon, but demonstrates the amount of opportunities that arise if it is possible to perform to the same levels of cost efficiency as Lincolnshire, equating to revenue savings of over £124m per annum when compared to the amount currently spent by Devon County Council.

The 4-5-1 model with two new Northern and Southern Unitaries for adult social care would enable place-based leadership with an opportunity for health and social care integration, as is evidenced in the successful model currently operated within Torbay.

Correlation between 2023/24 Adult Social Care spend per head and Adult Social Care Relative Needs Formulae calculated as part of Government's Fair Funding 2.0 consultation



Children's social care

A similar analysis has been completed for Children's Social Care and the results depicted in the graph below. This demonstrates that Devon County Council is spending above its assessed level based on the Government's calculation of relative needs. For Children's Social Care (CSC), this correlation between actual spend per head and CSC relative needs at a high-level indicates if an authority is spending at a level above their assessed need. The vertical distance above the 'line' indicating the level of savings which should be achievable just by working to an 'expected' standard of cost and performance. The graph below compares this assessment of spending level for children's social care for all County Councils in England. This demonstrates that Devon County Council is spending considerably above its assessed need which gives rise to the opportunity under LGR to explore efficiencies and savings.

In the 2023/24 financial year, Devon County Council was the third highest spend per head County Council (£1,230.04) on children's social care out of the 21 County Councils in England as shown below. This is spend per head of children's population.

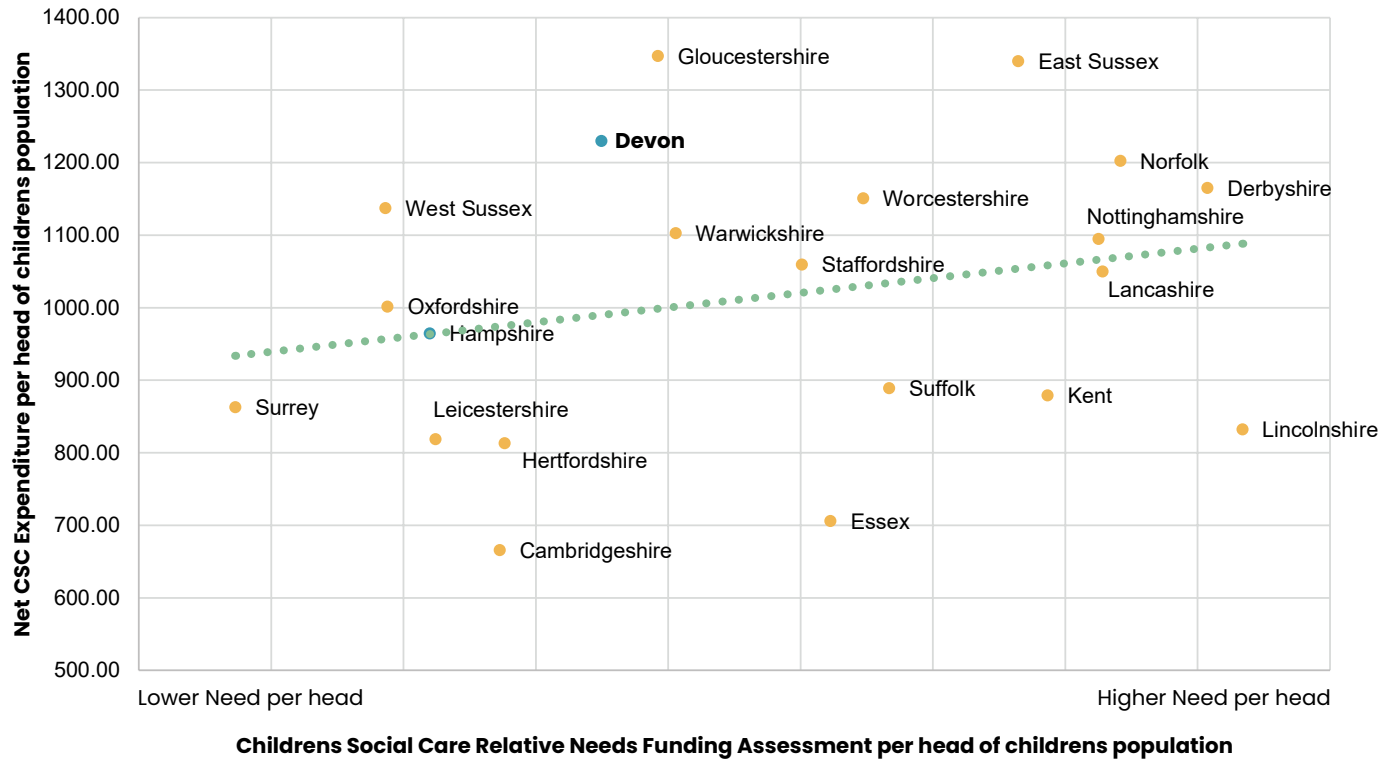
Whilst Devon County Council are the third highest spend per head County Council (£1,230.04), this is not solely due to how sparse Devon is as an area as an over-riding factor.

This is demonstrated by the fact that other sparsely populated counties such as Leicestershire and Lincolnshire spend significantly less per head on adult social care.

If Devon County Council were able to reduce their current spend per head (£1,230.04) to a level closer to Worcestershire (£1,150.97), or even just closer to the national averages, it could potentially recognise significant revenue savings of over £12m. **This provides a further level of assurance that the estimated childrens social care savings proposed under this 4-5-1 option of £10m in the Base Case and £20m in the Stretch Case are prudent and achievable.**

Worcestershire (£1,150.97 per head) is a good comparison as the 'relative need' is broadly similar to Devon, but even greater opportunities and efficiencies (approximately £62m) arise if it is possible to perform to the same levels of cost efficiency as Lincolnshire (£832.37 per head). Worcestershire received a 'Good' Ofsted rating for its Childrens services in

Correlation between 2023/24 Children's Social Care spend per head and Children's Social Care Relative Needs Formulae calculated as part of Government's Fair Funding 2.0 consultation



January 2025 and Lincolnshire was also rated as ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted for its Childrens services in June 2023.

District Councils understand their local area through housing, planning and community services which can form an integrated service to improve how children’s social care is delivered. Early help and preventative measures through services such as leisure services can significantly reduce costs. Three unitaries will maintain local knowledge, whilst ensuring that budget pressures do not put services for children at risk.

Creating two new southern and northern unitaries will enable a cultural reset to embed a new approach and vision for children’s services. It will also enable greater strategic capacity by giving each DCS a smaller population to focus on and increase the scope for early intervention and preventative work.

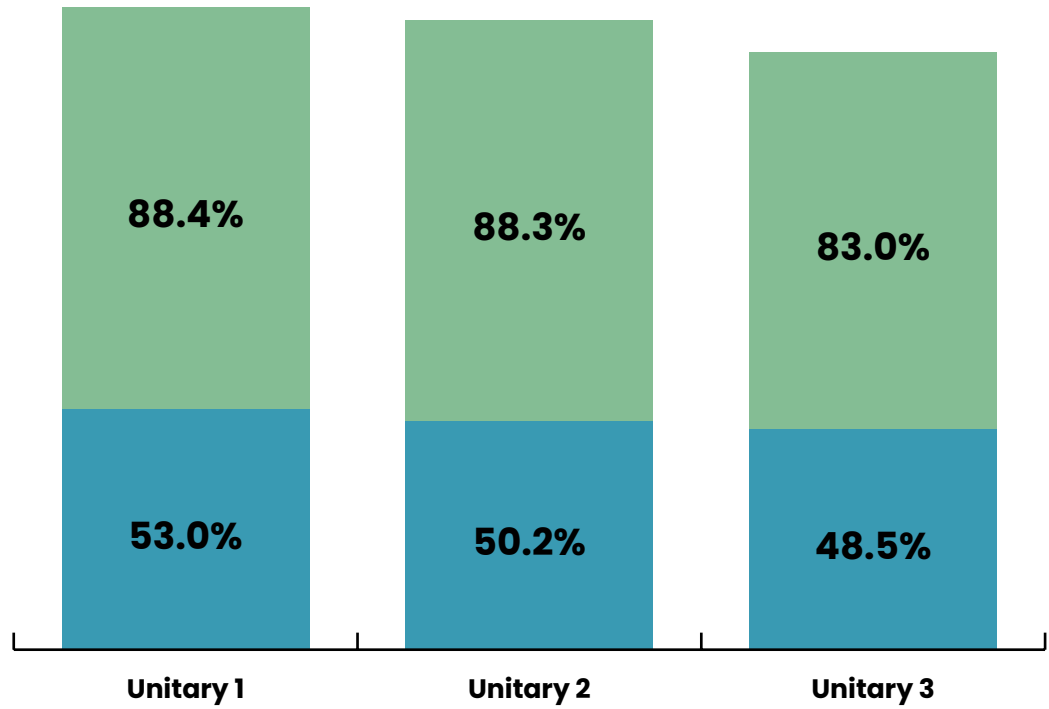
Social care spend to estimated care funding

The reason for focusing on the potential efficiencies available for children’s and adult’s services is that these two areas of spend currently make up between 48–53% of total spend and this is set to grow in the years ahead.

Social Care Spend to Estimated Core Funding

2025 Spend as % of Current Resources

2040 Spend as % of Current Resources



Source: Pixel Financial Management – LGR Funding Model FFR2.0 and Newton Consulting

The level of spend (actual and projected) to estimated core funding is consistent across the three proposed authorities. This demonstrates consistency between the three proposed unitary authorities and the estimated funding available to meet current and projected social care demand.

This is important, as it shows that each of the proposed new councils has a ‘fair’ proportion of likely future pressures being placed upon it in terms of budget utilisation. It also aligns with one of the underlying themes of our proposal around long-term sustainability and balance for the local government system across Devon.

Core funding

The analysis above strongly supports the view that **this preferred option is financially viable since the proportion of future estimated funding to spend is proportional and so no proposed authority is assessed to be left in an adverse state.**



Tedburn, Teignbridge

Improving council finances through efficiencies

South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council have been sharing services through sharing a single workforce since 2007 and have a proven track record of delivering efficiencies and savings for the District Councils. The shared service arrangements between South Hams and West Devon are one of the few shared arrangements (with a shared workforce across 2 councils) in the country. The case study below demonstrates how this has saved over £6million annually for the District Councils. We believe we can scale this up across a larger geographical area and deliver further efficiencies and savings which can be reinvested back into public services.

Working together



South Hams
District Council



West Devon
Borough Council

CASE STUDY

South Hams and West Devon – two councils, one team – providing financial and service resilience

South Hams and West Devon have pioneered an innovative shared services partnership that began in 2007, introducing a unified workforce and fully integrated systems and processes across both districts. This initiative generates ongoing annual savings of £6.2 million for South Hams and West Devon when compared to traditional models, demonstrating excellent value for money and enabling the Councils to protect and enhance frontline services.

A fundamental enabler has been the shared IT services, which provide the technology and infrastructure necessary for efficient, effective, and customer-focused service delivery across both councils. When compared with similarly sized organisations, this approach offers remarkable value for money, with total software, hardware, and staffing costs representing less than 10% of the combined 2024/25 net operating budgets.

In 2019, the Councils identified the need to upgrade legacy business systems to better meet future objectives and launched a programme to replace them with best-of-breed solutions. As part of this, the IT team replaced the contact centre and workflow system with a cost-effective, industry-leading low-code solution, allowing rapid development of customer-facing processes and meeting unexpected demands, such as processing Covid support grants, Household Support Fund (HSF) grants, and providing services to Ukrainian refugees. This platform helped the Councils earn the gold IESE best transformation team award for exceptional contribution and long-term positive impact on the organisation.

Call volumes have steadily declined year on year, with 80% of customer and resident transactions now carried out digitally since 2020. Over 220,000 digital transactions have been completed with the Councils.



Additional measures include:

- Refreshing key infrastructure to improve resilience, increase capacity, and enhance disaster recovery, with nearly all core systems (except one, planned for cloud migration in December 2025) now cloud based.
- Maintaining a fully agile workforce, which ensured continuity of services throughout the pandemic and resulted in annual savings of 140 tCOe since 2020.

- Enhancing cyber security and data protection to comply with the latest standards and regulations, safeguarding information and systems from threats or breaches, and participating in the MHCLG's Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) early adopter's programme.

Deploying robotic process automation since 2017 in Council Tax and Housing Benefits services, with ongoing expansion of automation and AI software across additional Council services.



Criteria 2c Managing transition costs and enabling transformation

Although there are costs associated with LGR, our proposal will deliver annual net recurring savings and will be expected to break even in just under three years. Our proposed structure of councils in the Devon region, will include three unitary authorities. As such, there will be no recurring increased ongoing costs related to upper tier services.

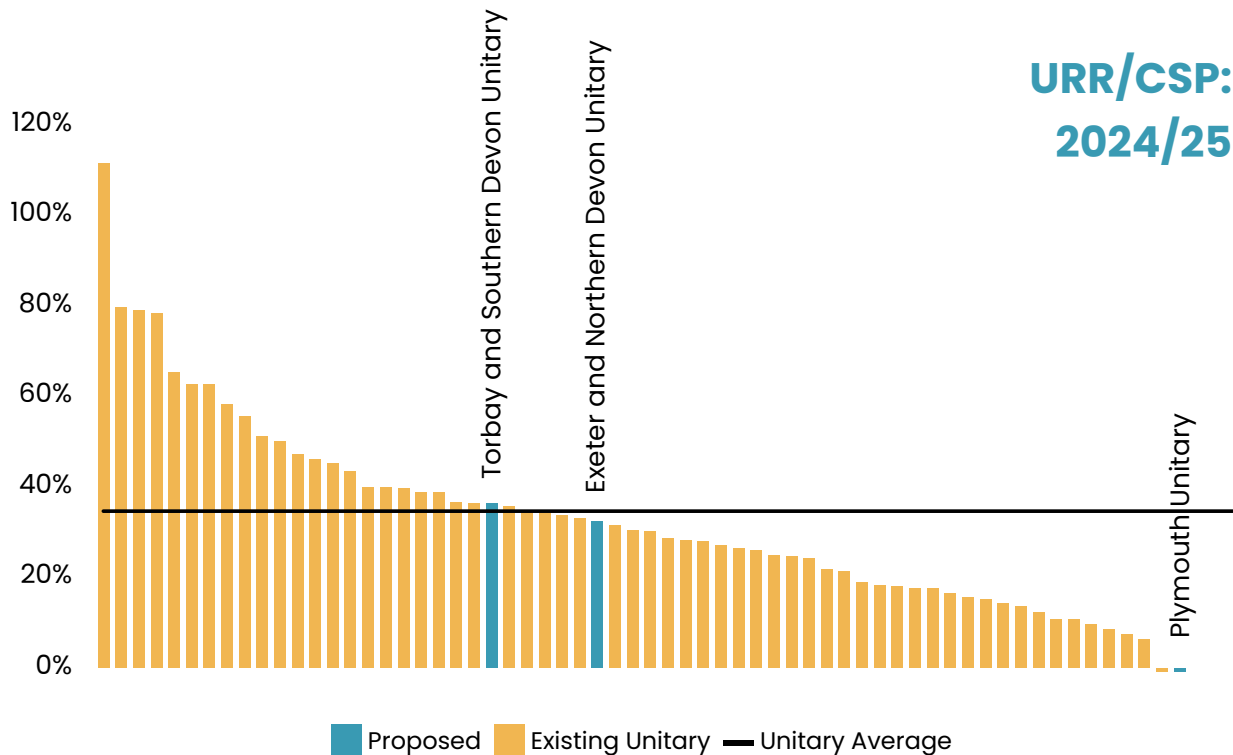
Transition costs, transformation and reserves

To realise the estimated benefits under Option C (4-5-1), initial, one-off implementation costs are expected to be incurred that will support the new authorities to transition to a steady state.

One option to fund such costs is to use available revenue reserves with the projected net benefit used in the longer-term to replenish these reserves. An analysis of available Useable Revenue Reserves (URR) has been completed, and based on 2024/25 levels, there is a total of £366.3 million in the Devon region.

The graph below analyses available usable revenue reserves (URR) as percentage of Core Spending Power (CSP) and on this measure the Southern and Northern unitaries would start with average levels of usable revenue reserves. Reserve levels for Plymouth are expected to increase as and when Exceptional Financial Support is agreed and applied.

The shadow authorities for the new unitary authorities will be best placed to consider how such initial costs could be funded, whether these form part of the initial medium-term financial plans for budget setting or if useable revenue reserves could be used and subsequently replenished.

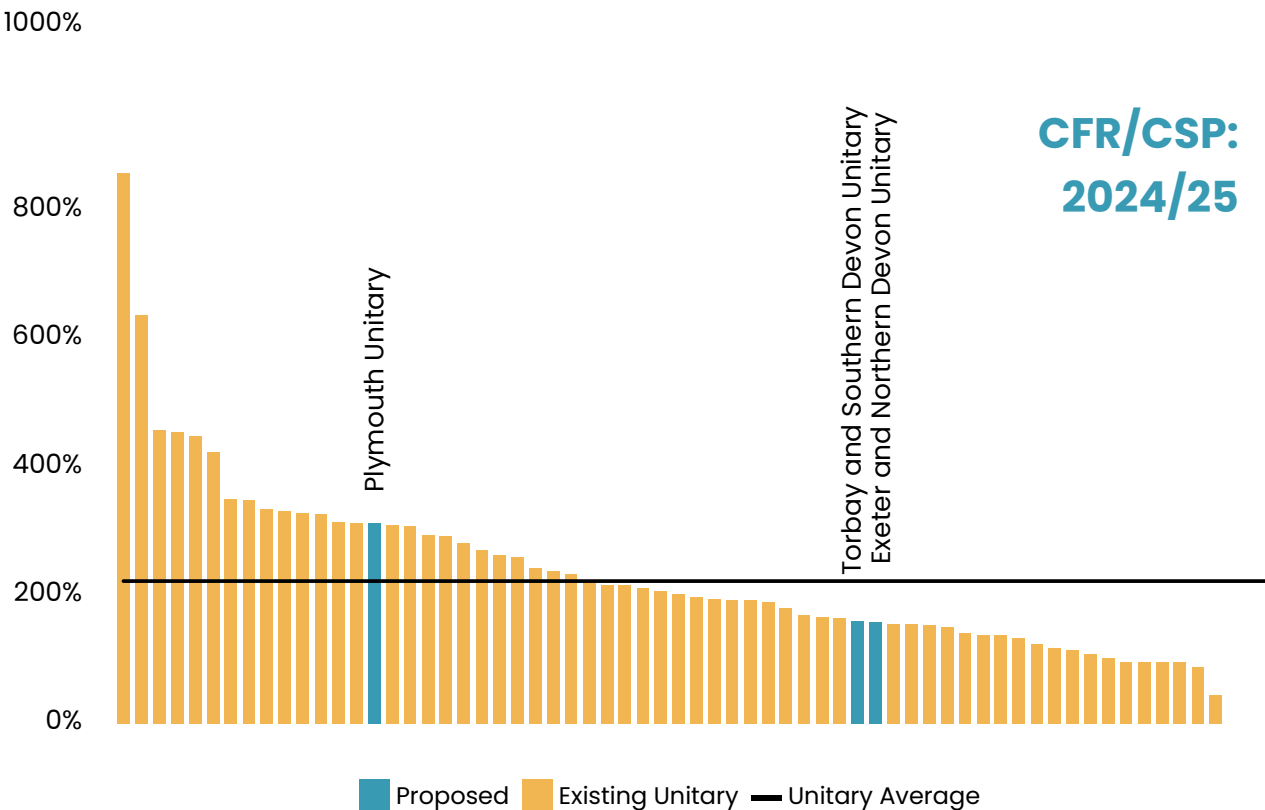


Criteria 2e Managing council debt

Managing council debt

Capital Financing Requirement – The need to borrow

Whilst Plymouth has a higher than average need to borrow based on 2024/25 capital financing requirement (CFR), the rest of Devon (in aggregate) has lower levels of debt, meaning that the new proposed Southern and Northern unitaries would commence with lower Capital Financing Requirements (the need to borrow) than the national average. The graph below shows Capital Financing Requirements (CFR) as a proportion of Core Spending Power (CSP). This measures the level of debt/borrowing as a percentage of the Core Spending Power (CSP).



Debt gearing

Debt gearing, the relationship between needing to borrow and available equity on the balance sheet, provides a useful context for understanding historic decisions that have resulted in longer-term debt. Plymouth and the proposed southern unitary would have higher debt gearing than average and this a consequence of investment property holdings in Plymouth, Torbay and West Devon.

In these cases, the higher levels of debt for these authorities are accompanied by investment property rental incomes which will contribute to the future repayment of that debt.

Shadow authorities will need to carefully consider future capital investment decisions by considering local priorities, strategic opportunities against future impacts on revenue budgets on top of existing long-term borrowing.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit

In addition, it is important to recognise and mitigate what would otherwise be significant implications in respect of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

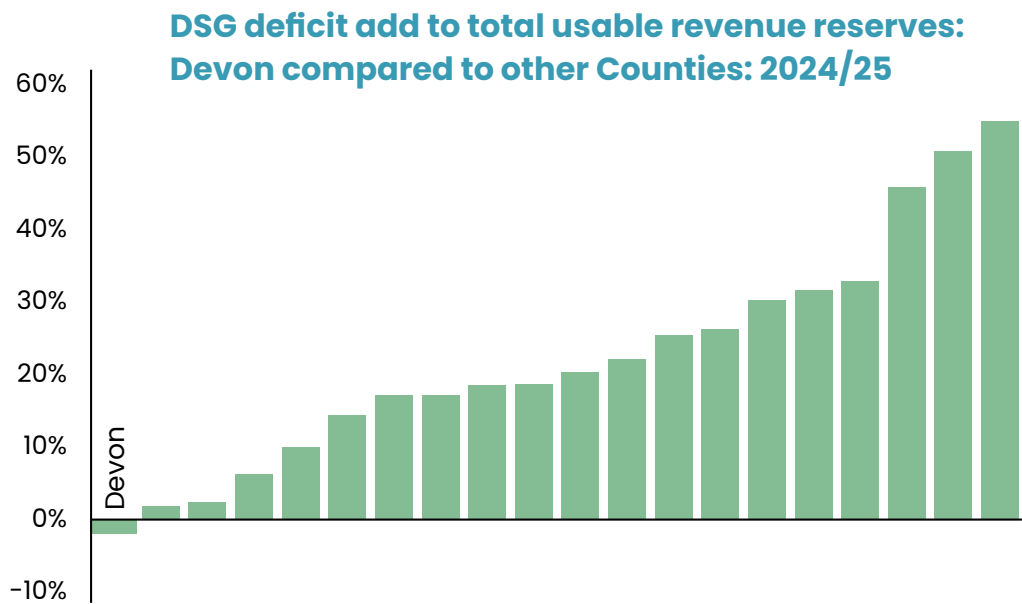
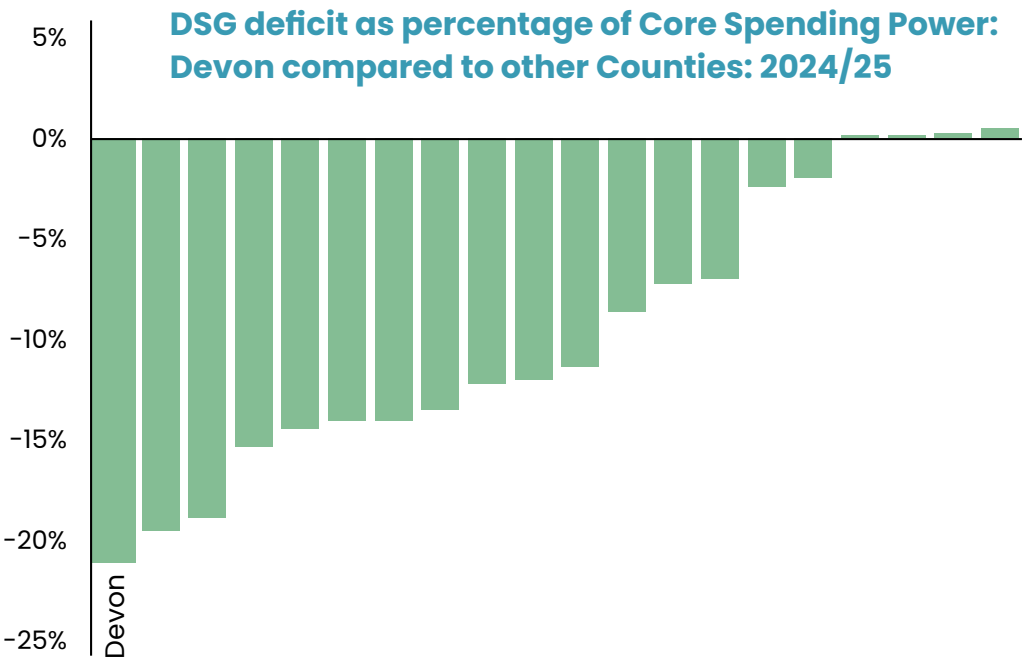
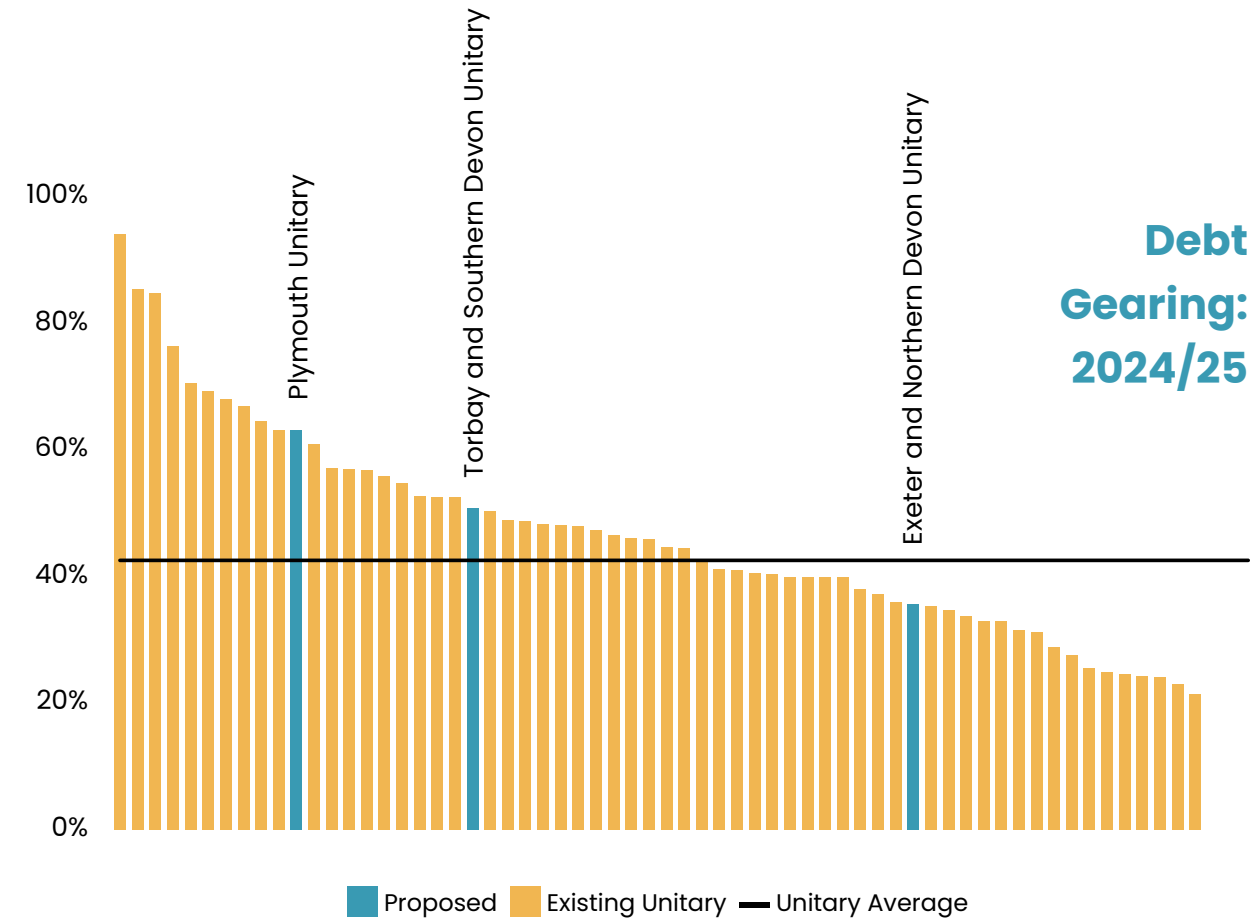
Devon County Council, along with others across England, are currently managing pressures from deficits to the DSG which present a significant risk to their future financial health. This deficit would be apportioned across to our new proposed unitary authorities with the abolishment of the existing county authority.

The pressure is more acute in Devon as the existing county council is not performing well on many of its service areas when benchmarked on a national scale. For context, Devon County Council has the highest DSG deficit when expressed as a proportion of Core Spending Power, of all County Councils for 2024/25, so while change offers a significant opportunity for improvement, it is important to note the financial legacy that will need managing by the new unitary councils.

The DSG deficit for Devon County Council (£167.3m per 2024/25 accounts) is higher than its level of usable revenue reserves (£153.7m per 24/25 accounts) and this means that without the current temporary statutory override, which allows councils to show DSG deficits as an unusable reserve, Devon County Council would have negative usable revenue reserves as shown below:

This is recognised as a national problem, and a consultation is expected in late autumn 2025 by the government to explore the root causes of the deficits and resolutions for existing DSG deficits.

Future shadow authorities will need to carefully consider any proposals from this consultation as they develop and how best to manage any deficits that are inherited within their unitary area.





Plymouth

Criteria 3:

High quality and sustainable public services

Our locally rooted unitary model for Devon enhances public services through integration, local knowledge, and operational resilience. Our proposed model for local government reorganisation in Devon prioritises the delivery of high-quality, sustainable public services by aligning governance with real communities and functional economic areas, enabling tailored solutions for adult social care, children’s services, housing, planning, transport, recycling, and more.

By building on existing strengths and fostering strong partnerships, our model minimises disruption, supports innovation, and ensures services are designed around people and places, achieving better outcomes without sacrificing local responsiveness.

Criteria three focuses on the ability for an option to deliver high quality and sustainable public services. According to guidance provided by the government, there are three key areas that we address throughout this section:

Criteria 3a	Improving service delivery and avoiding fragmentation
Criteria 3b	Opportunities to deliver public service reform
Criteria 3c	Minimising impact on crucial services

Introduction

The ambition for local government reorganisation in Devon is not simply to redraw boundaries, but to fundamentally improve the quality, sustainability, and responsiveness of public services for every resident. Our model is designed as a catalyst for transformation, enabling a step-change in how services are planned, delivered, and experienced. This section sets out how the proposed structure will enable Devon to move from a fragmented, reactive system to one that is integrated, preventative, and rooted in the unique character of each place.

The best public services are those that are close to communities, shaped by local knowledge, and delivered through strong partnerships. Our model, with its balanced, locally rooted unitaries, is uniquely positioned to deliver on this promise for Devon. We have the opportunity to strengthen and expand the district cultures that prioritise delivering outstanding customer service—services that are shaped by, and responsive to, the needs and input of local communities.

Our three unitary model provides a balance of being close to place, while ensuring sustainable financial resilience. By aligning governance with real communities and functional economic areas, our model provides the scale to drive efficiency and innovation, while retaining the local focus needed to respond to the diverse needs of urban, rural, and coastal areas.

Devon has a once in a lifetime opportunity to redesign services and organisational structures to better meet our people and places. We can create new organisational cultures with a multifunctional workforce that not only understand the needs of residents in their service, but through deep collaboration with other services understand where the challenges that residents face overlap. This is our opportunity to deliver public sector reform, using best practice as the foundation for effective new services.

Our options appraisal approach involved applying various metrics to assess the viability of options with respect to balance and sustainability for both the unitary authority and Devon overall. The results show that there is little variation in metrics among the three unitaries, with our 4-5-1 option showing comparable balance across the majority of metrics.

Government Criteria 3: High quality and sustainable public services

Assessment Metric	Southern	Northern	Plymouth
Deprivation score	0.12	0.1	0.15
Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) Apr-Jun 2024	1.34	1.71	1.58
Rough Sleeper Count (Autumn 2023)	40	63	41
Number of Households in TA per 1,000 population Apr-Jun 2024	0.69	1.62	3.05
Total number of households in B&B Hotels Apr-Jun 2024	51	74	187
65+ Population	119,032	136,244	50,601
Female life expectancy	84.56	84.25	82.43
Unemployment rates	2.76	2.54	3.52
Crime rates	62.21	60.14	94.96
Travel time (estimated car travel time between the two most distant towns/villages within the proposed unitary area)	2h	2h10min	15min

Improving services by working together

While financial savings are often a headline driver for reorganisation, the delivery of high-quality public services depends on more than scale. Our model offers a balanced structure that enables meaningful service improvement by aligning governance with the way communities live, work, and interact with services. It avoids the dilution of local responsiveness that can occur in larger, less differentiated unitary models. Our model would create the ‘best of both’ proposition, with scale achieved alongside local visibility, understanding and ambition. As an example, our Northern Devon unitary would immediately become the largest council in the region by geography, larger than Cornwall and Somerset. Yet, by realigning the three existing upper-tier authorities in Devon into a more balanced three unitary model, our proposed also avoids the undesirable cost of realignment to smaller units, creating a simpler, more streamlined approach to place-based governance service delivery, without the cost often associated with these.

In areas such as housing, planning, transport, recycling, and public safety, our configuration supports more tailored and joined-up approaches. For example, housing services benefit from closer links to community needs and health outcomes, with opportunities to better support vulnerable groups and care leavers through integrated planning and data sharing. The current housing stock-holding councils would all be combined in this model, bringing together Housing Revenue Account expertise and scale, unlocking efficiencies and purchasing power, and unleashing accelerated delivery of social and affordable housing. Planning and transport strategies can be more effectively aligned with local infrastructure priorities, avoiding the disconnect seen in broader models. Existing collaboration across districts—such as shared IT systems and joint local plans—provides a strong foundation for service integration and digital enablement.

Waste and recycling services also stand to gain from our model’s ability to consolidate operations while retaining local control. Route optimisation, fleet decarbonisation, and circular economy initiatives are more feasible when services are designed around real geographies rather than administrative convenience. Public safety, including homelessness and crime prevention, benefits from our model’s capacity to maintain strong local partnerships and respond to place-specific challenges.

Our model offers a platform to align and enhance, at a local community level, the draft Devon Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy – ‘Your Voice, Your Health, Your Devon’ – and its emerging priorities:

- Mental health: Support people’s mental health in Devon so they feel supported, safe and understood.
- Best start in life: Give every child in Devon the best chance to grow, learn and thrive.
- Housing: Make sure everyone has a safe, warm and stable place to live in Devon.
- Rural areas and access to services: Ensure and support all people in Devon to be able to access the services and places they need

Ultimately, our model enables services to be designed around people and places, not just cost lines. It offers a platform for reform that is rooted in local knowledge, operational resilience, and the ability to adapt to future needs, delivering better outcomes without sacrificing the strengths of existing service delivery.

CASE STUDY

Northern Devon Futures Strategy

Northern Devon faces unique challenges and opportunities as a rural coastal region. Recognising the need for collective action, a diverse partnership of public, private, and voluntary organisations, including councils, the NHS, police, education, business, and community groups, have come together under the “Thriving in Northern Devon” strategy. Their shared vision is clear: everyone in Northern Devon should have the same opportunity to live a healthy, sustainable, and fulfilling life.

The partnership’s mission is rooted in collaboration. By sharing expertise and resources, partners aim to create a vibrant, sustainable region that attracts investment and unlocks long-term prosperity. The strategy emphasises:

- A shared workplan and alignment with national policy (health, economy, education, climate, housing, culture).

- Strong, inclusive partnerships across the community.
- The power of anchor institutions to connect priorities and drive change.
- Valuing culture and nature as threads that unite communities.

The strategy is informed by key performance indicators (KPIs) that highlight both strengths and areas for improvement. For example, qualification levels in North Devon and Torridge lag behind regional and national averages, and the area ranks in the lower third for competitiveness among UK regions. House affordability and trade balance data reveal significant challenges, with Northern Devon importing £1.5bn more than it exports – an opportunity for local economic growth.

There are six action groups that drive the strategy, each with clear aims, objectives, and KPIs:

- Economy, Innovation and Skills: Focuses on improving productivity, supporting local industry clusters, driving export growth, and fostering skills and aspiration for all. Measures include GVA per hour, wage levels, and qualification rates.

- Climate: Prepares communities for climate change and leads a just transition to net zero. Objectives include shifting to renewable energy, aligning planning policy, and supporting carbon reduction. Progress is tracked via renewable energy adoption and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Housing & Infrastructure: Ensures safe, warm homes for all and vibrant, resilient communities. Intelligence from residents shapes responses to housing needs, and the strategy champions the region’s natural and built environment.
- Children and Young People: Aims to provide environments where young people thrive, with interventions informed by lived experience. Priorities include digital access, work experience, apprenticeships, and support for SEND.
- Community Wellbeing and Inclusion: Builds strong, connected communities through co-produced action plans, engagement with underrepresented groups, and sustainable partnership models. Wellbeing and cohesion are measured using the Community Spirit Level framework.

- Health & Equity: Seeks to increase healthy life expectancy and reduce inequalities. The strategy supports neighbourhood-based care, prioritises prevention, and strengthens integration through multi-disciplinary teams. Key measures include reduced A&E attendances, improved access to care, and co-designed services.

Each action group reports progress to either the North Devon Futures Board or One Northern Devon Board, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement. The Northern Devon Cultural Partnership Board works across all groups, connecting and strengthening partnerships.

The Thriving in Northern Devon Partnership Strategy exemplifies how place-based, cross-sector collaboration can address complex challenges. By aligning resources, valuing lived experience, and focusing on measurable outcomes, the partnership is laying the foundation for a healthier, more prosperous, and inclusive future for Northern Devon.





CASE STUDY

Devon Building Control Partnership

The Devon Building Control Partnership (DBCP) has existed in various iterations since 2004 and consists of Teignbridge District Council, West Devon Borough Council and South Hams District Council to discharge their functions with regard to building control.

The current entity exists as a Joint Committee model as prescribed under various legislation including the Local Government Act 1972, Section 9EB of the Local Government Act 2000, the Local Authorities (Arrangements for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012 and commenced on the 1st of April 2017

The main aims of the Partnership are:

- To enforce the Building Regulations and allied legislation
- Promote the creation of a healthy, safe and accessible built environment for the wellbeing of customers and the wider community
- Provide a high quality, effective, efficient and customer focussed building control service
- To maintain an effective and well-trained workforce with a commercially minded approach
- That Devon Building Control Partnership services are used on a large proportion of all applications serviced with the geographical area
- To determine building regulation applications and carry out site inspections within timescales

Teignbridge leads and hosts the Devon Building Control Partnership (DBCP), which operates in a challenging, competitive environment while fulfilling statutory duties amid limited resources. Despite these pressures, DBCP has consistently exceeded benchmarks in service delivery, customer satisfaction, market share, and income generation. Through efficient resource and financial management and adoption of new technology, it has enabled partner authorities to reduce contributions to non-fee earning accounts. Recognised nationally as a model service, DBCP has received multiple LABC 'Team of the Year' nominations and has won once. It maintains an 83% market share—well above the national average—and consistently meets or surpasses all key performance indicators. DBCP was among the first to ensure all surveyors met regulatory qualification requirements and is currently the only fully qualified provider in Devon. The Partnership has passed all recent audits, including BSI 9001, without non-compliances, and engages regularly with clients through training, events, and an annual awards ceremony. It also actively supports regional low carbon retrofit initiatives via the Southwest Energy Partnership.

Conclusion

The Devon Building Control Partnership (DBCP) exemplifies a successful collaborative model in local authority service delivery. Through its commitment to regulatory excellence, customer engagement, and continuous improvement, the Partnership has consistently outperformed local and national benchmarks and maintained a dominant market share in a competitive environment. Its proactive investment in workforce development and technological innovation has positioned it as a leading authority in building control, both regionally and nationally. As the Partnership continues to evolve, it remains dedicated to delivering high quality, resilient, and forward-thinking services that benefit its constituent councils, clients and the wider community.



Minimising risk of disruption to critical services

Our model has been designed to minimise disruption to critical services by building on existing strengths. Rather than dismantling established delivery structures, it consolidates and realigns them in a way that reflects how services are already organised and experienced by residents.

Our configuration retains Plymouth, builds on the strengths of the existing Torbay Unitary Authority and focuses reorganisation and the realignment of services across the proposed area as a whole. This approach reduces the complexity and risk associated with splitting high-cost, high-risk services such as housing, waste, and public safety. It allows for continuity in service delivery while enabling transformation through more coherent governance.

Many of Devon County Council’s services are already delivered through area-based models. For example, locality offices and community-based hubs are embedded across areas, such that Devon’s Children’s and Families Teams are already based in area-based officers. Our model builds on this by aligning new authorities with functional geographies and existing service footprints, enabling smoother transitions and reducing the need for wholesale restructuring.

In housing, our model supports continuity by bringing together stock-holding authorities with shared delivery models. This enables consistent approaches to homelessness, fuel poverty, and supported housing, while retaining the local knowledge that underpins effective prevention. In waste and recycling, our model avoids the disruption of splitting strategic contracts or depot networks, instead enabling route optimisation and shared investment in fleet decarbonisation and circular economy initiatives.

Planning and transport services also benefit from our model’s ability to align with existing infrastructure corridors and travel-to-work areas. This reduces the risk of fragmented decision-making and supports the delivery of integrated spatial strategies. Public safety services, including community safety partnerships and crime prevention initiatives, are preserved through our model’s emphasis on place-based collaboration and alignment with police and fire geographies.

By retaining the existing unitary of Plymouth and realigning the current provision, our model avoids the risks associated with creating a new greenfield authority with little experience in certain service areas. It enables a phased and manageable transition, supported by shared systems, joint commissioning, and collaborative governance. This ensures that critical services remain stable and responsive throughout the reorganisation process.



Impacts on crucial services

Challenges for crucial services	Addressing needs through our proposed model
■ Fragmented housing delivery, misaligned asset strategies, and inconsistent responses to homelessness	■ Strategic land management across unitary footprints; integration of housing and health; scaling of best practice in modular housing
■ Inconsistent waste and recycling performance, limited innovation, and fragmented contracts	■ Strategic waste partnerships; route optimisation; fleet integration; circular economy initiatives; shared procurement and digitisation
■ Poor transport connectivity and reactive infrastructure planning	■ Unified governance for planning and transport; integrated spatial strategies; stronger advocacy for investment; alignment with TTWAs
■ Disjointed environmental stewardship and lack of integrated sustainability planning	■ Locally owned strategies for climate resilience and biodiversity; integration with housing and transport; partnerships for net zero goals
■ Hidden rural deprivation and coastal socio-economic disparities	■ Strategic resource deployment across broader geographies; subsidiarity through LCNs and parish councils; tailored local interventions
■ Service duplication and inefficiencies under two-tier system	■ Consolidation into three unitaries; integrated service delivery; shared systems and contracts; removal of overlapping responsibilities
■ Lack of strategic coordination across public safety and homelessness services	■ Alignment with police, fire, and ICS footprints; joint commissioning; co-located service hubs; place-based community safety partnerships.
■ Maintaining security and safety in children’s services, as well as securing any nascent improvement emerging in the current county area	■ Children’s services are already delivered via an area model. Alongside this, there has been district involvement in key aspects of Children’s services improvement to ensure visibility and support while addressing current inadequate rating. Detailed discussions with statutory Directors of Children’s services to ensure that best practice is shared, and that change is used to preserve and protect foundational activity, while delivering the organisational and cultural change required to accelerate improved outcomes for the whole of Devon
■ Maintaining quality and consistency of adult social care commissioning	■ The social care commissioning model already works on an area basis, and our model will open up opportunities for greater sharing of best practice, while retaining appropriate scale to liaise with the provider market on a meaningful basis, and contribute to wider SW regional activity and influence through the SW DASS network

Strong leadership and governance

Effective service delivery depends on clear leadership, accountable governance, and the ability to make decisions close to communities. Our model introduces a governance framework that is designed to support this by streamlining oversight, strengthening strategic planning, and embedding local responsiveness into the heart of public service delivery.

At the unitary level, each new authority will possess the scale and clarity required to drive transformative change across public services. Crucially, this model brings together services for children, adults, housing, and community safety, mirroring the 'Family Hub' approach successfully pioneered by Torbay Council, bringing together upper and lower tier services are integrated under robust, unified leadership. This goes further than simply consolidating housing, transport, waste, and environmental services under a single accountable body and promotes a genuinely holistic approach where families and individuals benefit from seamless access to support, early intervention, and preventative care. Our governance framework strengthens the delivery of people-centred services, prioritising early support for vulnerable individuals and families within a fully integrated system. Councillor numbers and ward boundaries will be determined through national guidance and local consultation, ensuring that representation remains proportionate and accessible. In turn, this underpins consistent service standards, integrated commissioning, and the creation of strategic partnerships spanning health, education, and infrastructure.

At the neighbourhood level, mechanisms such as Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) and Local Community Networks (LCNs) will provide formal channels for community input and oversight. These structures build on the strengths of existing town and parish councils, ensuring that services such as housing support, waste collection, and community safety remain responsive to local needs. They also enable participatory budgeting and co-designed service models, helping to embed prevention and early intervention into delivery.



At the regional level, our model supports strategic coordination across the three unitaries, enabling coherent engagement with NHS Integrated Care Boards, police and fire services, and infrastructure planning bodies. Each unitary is grounded in a coherent economic geography, allowing for focused leadership on growth, regeneration, and service innovation. This structure supports joint commissioning, pooled budgets, and shared service hubs—particularly in areas like Adult Social Care (ASC), homelessness, recycling, and transport.

The governance model also enables the creation of joint committees and delivery groups that reflect functional geographies and service footprints. These groups will be critical in maintaining service continuity during transition and driving transformation post-implementation. They will oversee shared contracts, digital infrastructure, and workforce development, ensuring that services are resilient, future-ready, and locally attuned.

Critically, by creating two new councils, it will provide the opportunity for revitalised officer teams to establish the new councils and to drive through the changes in strategic leadership and direction, improvement in core services and developing a strong and effective organisational culture.

Continuity through simplicity is a guiding principle of the proposed model

Our model is deliberately designed to minimise disruption and maximise continuity. By retaining Plymouth and building on the strengths of the existing Torbay Unitary Authority and focusing reorganisation and the realignment of services across the proposed area as a whole, our model avoids the complex and unnecessary costly changes. This approach ensures that critical services such as adult social care, children's services, SEND, and homelessness support are not fragmented or destabilised during transition.

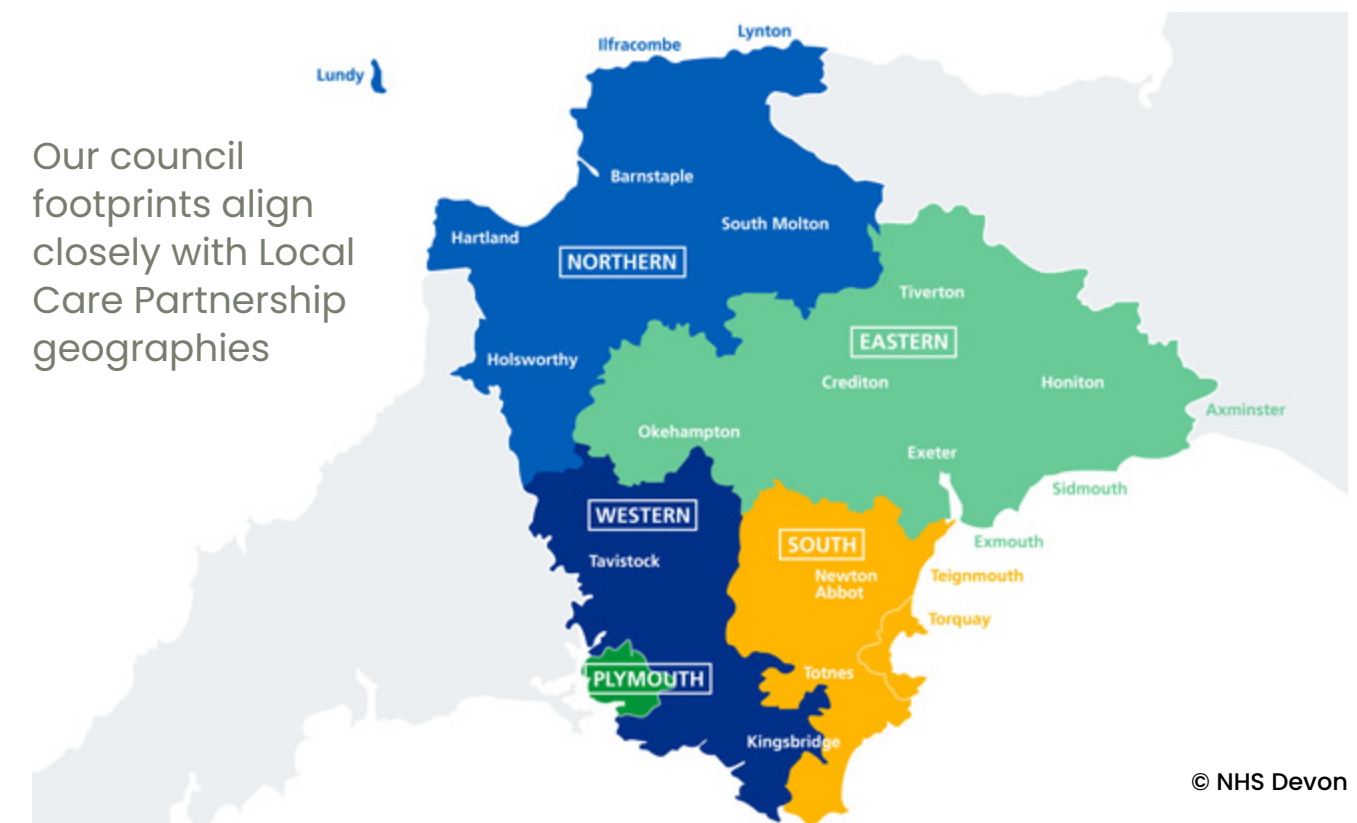
Rather than dismantling established delivery structures, our model consolidates and aligns them with logical geographies and communities. This enables smoother transitions, reduces implementation risk, and preserves the institutional knowledge and operational resilience that underpin high-performing services. It also allows for the retention of existing partnerships, contracts,

and systems, which can be scaled and adapted rather than rebuilt from scratch.

Continuity through simplicity also provides a strong foundation for transformation. Each new unitary authority will inherit a coherent service footprint, enabling them to build on existing strengths and pursue targeted improvements. For example, stock-holding authorities within the proposed configuration can expand successful housing initiatives, while shared waste infrastructure can be optimised for efficiency and sustainability. The alignment with health, police and fire geographies, and voluntary sector networks further supports integrated service delivery and early intervention.

By avoiding the disruption our option instead realigns existing services onto the new footprints of the 4:5 area, our model enables councils to focus on what matters most: improving outcomes for residents. It supports the development of joined-up commissioning strategies, co-located service hubs, and neighbourhood governance structures that reflect the lived experience of communities. This continuity empowers councils to deliver better services from day one, while unlocking opportunities for innovation, digitisation, and long-term transformation.

Our council footprints align closely with Local Care Partnership geographies



© NHS Devon



Removing duplication and levelling up performance

The current two-tier system in Devon has led to a fragmented approach to service delivery, with overlapping responsibilities, inconsistent standards, and missed opportunities for integration. Across key service areas such as Children's and Adult's services, housing, planning, transport, waste, and environmental management, stakeholders have identified duplication, inefficiencies, and a lack of strategic coordination as persistent challenges. Our model offers a structure that could enable a more coherent and efficient approach, supporting the levelling up of performance across the county.

By consolidating functions within three unitary authorities, our model would allow for the alignment of planning, infrastructure, and transport under a single governance structure. This could support the development of integrated spatial strategies that reflect the needs of both urban and rural areas and enable more effective advocacy for infrastructure investment at regional and national levels. Digitally enabled planning and

transport services—supported by cloud-based systems and integrated data platforms—could improve customer experience, reduce duplication, and support more responsive delivery. Neighbourhood planning could be more closely linked to infrastructure funding, ensuring that growth is inclusive and locally informed.

The current duplication that drives up costs relating to Adult Social Care and Children's Services, creates inconsistent contracting and provider oversight, and fragments specialist expertise in areas such as mental health commissioning, foster placement sufficiency and housing adaptations. Separate digital platforms and performance frameworks for Ofsted-monitored children's services and CQC-regulated adult social care further silo intelligence, limiting the ability to spot cross-cutting trends in demand, workforce shortages or emerging market failures.

Our model tackles this by centralising backbone functions at the strategic tier—unified commissioning hubs, single digital reporting platforms and a joint learning academies for example—while retaining local delivery and place-based partnerships. Our proposed structure will improve performance by embedding best practice from high-



performing areas (like Torbay's relational practice) across the entire footprint. Shared workforce pipelines and apprenticeship schemes, together with consolidated market oversight, and the targeted commissioning of tailored support and placements will ensure that both adult and children's services benefit from consistent quality standards, equitable resource allocation and faster diffusion of innovation, narrowing performance gaps without losing the local agility that underpins strong community relationships.

In waste and recycling, the current mix of district and county responsibilities has resulted in variable performance and limited innovation. Our model could support the creation of strategic waste partnerships, enabling route optimisation, fleet integration, and shared procurement. This would provide a platform for investment in circular economy initiatives, such as anaerobic digestion and commercial waste expansion, while also supporting the digitisation of services to improve efficiency and responsiveness. The proximity of high- and low-performing areas within the proposed unitary boundaries may also create opportunities for best practice sharing and performance improvement.

Housing services, currently delivered at district level, face challenges in affordability, homelessness, and integration with health and care. The proposed model would bring housing, planning, and asset management into a single authority, enabling more strategic land management and coordinated delivery. This could support the unlocking of sites for affordable and sustainable housing and allow for more consistent responses to fuel poverty and homelessness. Existing innovation—such as modular housing, land trusts, and repurposing of temporary accommodation—could be scaled across the new authorities, supported by shared expertise and consistent standards.

Environmental services, including climate resilience and biodiversity enhancement, are currently delivered through a patchwork of local and county arrangements. Our model would allow each unitary to develop locally owned strategies for environmental stewardship, regeneration, and sustainable growth. Integration of environmental planning with housing and transport could help embed sustainability across all service areas, while partnerships with national bodies and local stakeholders could support the delivery of net zero ambitions and nature recovery strategies.

CASE STUDY

Balancing housing growth and nature protection in South East Devon

South East Devon is home to three internationally important wildlife sites: the Exe Estuary (Special Protection Area, SPA), Dawlish Warren (Special Area of Conservation, SAC) and the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths (SPA/SAC). Collectively, these sites support thousands of overwintering birds, rare species like the Dartford warbler and Nightjar, and nationally scarce habitats such as sand dunes and lowland heath.

National housing policy is driving a rapid increase in housebuilding to tackle the country's housing shortage. For South East Devon, this translates to over 30,000 new homes within 10km of these internationally protected habitats. A joint Habitat Regulations Assessment confirmed that such growth would significantly increase recreational pressure, risking long-term damage to the sites. Without an effective plan to avoid or mitigate these impacts, Local Plans could not lawfully progress.

In response, East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge councils formed a pioneering partnership with Natural England, the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, the RSPB, Devon Wildlife Trust, the Exe Estuary Management Partnership and Footprint Ecology. Together they developed the South East Devon European Site Mitigation Strategy, adopted in 2014. This is superseded by the South East Devon Wildlife – Joint Habitats Mitigation Strategy 2024, adopted summer 2025.

Drawing on a decade of effective mitigation, the revised long-term plan sets out more than 40 targeted measures to protect vulnerable species and habitats over the next 80 years. It is funded by developer contributions (CIL and S106/111/UU) levied per new home, ensuring that growth directly supports the protection of nature.

The councils created a formal joint governance body—the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee (SEDHREC)—in 2016 to oversee delivery. With delegated powers from all three authorities, SEDHREC operates through ongoing collaboration between the councils, demonstrating effective cross-boundary governance and joint working.

Delivery focuses on two complementary approaches:

- **Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMMs)** — on-site measures to reduce visitor impacts, such as Wildlife Wardens, the “Devon Loves Dogs” responsible dog ownership scheme, codes of conduct, improved paths and signage, enhanced visitor access infrastructure and a joint patrol boat initiative with the Exeter Port Authority.
- **Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS)** — creation of attractive new green spaces to divert recreation pressure away from the protected sites.

This approach has already delivered visible results. Two wildlife refuges have been created in the Exe Estuary to safeguard overwintering birds. The 26-hectare Dawlish Countryside Park SANGS, created with Teignbridge District Council, has proved hugely popular (88,000 visits in the first 6 months) and won national awards. Visitor monitoring shows the site is successfully drawing recreational use away from Dawlish Warren. Ridgetop Park in South West Exeter (38ha) and emerging SANGS in East Devon at Cranbrook and Exmouth will provide continuing access to new greenspace for all residents.



Across all these areas, our proposed model could also help address workforce challenges by creating resilient organisations with the capacity to invest in staff development and digital infrastructure. This may support the creation of future-ready teams capable of responding to changing demands and delivering consistent, high-quality services across Devon.



Grounds maintenance, Mid Devon

Prevention and early intervention delivered through stronger public sector partnerships

The current two-tier system in Devon presents structural limitations that hinder the delivery of joined-up, preventative services. Fragmented governance and inconsistent commissioning arrangements have made it difficult to embed early intervention across public sector partnerships. This has led to reactive service models, duplication of effort, and missed opportunities to address root causes of demand.

Our model offers a more coherent framework for prevention by aligning governance with functional geographies and existing service footprints. Our model of three unitaries enables strategic commissioning across broader footprints while maintaining local responsiveness. This structure supports the integration of services around communities, facilitating earlier support and reducing escalation into high-cost interventions.

Public sector partners across Devon have consistently highlighted the need for stronger collaboration to deliver preventative outcomes. There is an opportunity to improve joint working and strategic priorities by aligning local government boundaries with NHS Integrated Care System (ICS) footprints, police and fire geographies, and voluntary sector networks. Our model responds to this by grouping areas with shared service infrastructure and community ties, enabling more effective joint working and resource pooling.

In North and East Devon, the proposed Northern Devon unitary authority brings together districts already collaborating through shared service arrangements and locality-based health partnerships. This configuration supports the development of integrated neighbourhood teams, co-located service hubs, and joint commissioning strategies. It also enables targeted investment in upstream interventions, such as housing support, community safety, and mental health services, which are currently fragmented across multiple tiers. This is evidenced through the Northern Devon Futures Strategic Board.

The South unitary authority consolidates areas with established joint planning and service delivery models. The inclusion of South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon reflects existing collaboration in areas such as waste, planning, building control, procurement and community health. This unitary structure provides the scale needed to invest in preventative infrastructure—such as digital platforms, shared data systems, and community-based service models—while retaining the local knowledge required to tailor interventions effectively.

The retained Plymouth unitary would continue to operate as a strategic partner, with proven capability in delivering integrated services. Its continued autonomy ensures that successful models of prevention and early intervention—such as neighbourhood health hubs and targeted youth support—can be maintained and scaled through partnership with the new authorities.

Our model will further develop and expand service delivery hubs in key locations such as Exeter, Barnstaple, and Tiverton. These hubs will act as focal points for integrated public services, bringing together council, health, employment, and voluntary sector support under one roof. By building on successful models already operating in places like Totnes and Newton Abbot, we will ensure that residents across Devon have accessible, joined-up services tailored to local needs.

Across all three unitaries, our model supports a shift from reactive to preventative service delivery. It enables the development of shared outcomes frameworks, joint workforce planning, and pooled budgets, which are essential for tackling complex challenges such as homelessness, substance misuse, and social isolation. By embedding prevention into the design of new authorities, our model creates the conditions for sustainable public services that improve outcomes and reduce long-term demand.

CASE STUDY

South Devon and Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership (CSP)

Teignbridge delivers community safety functions in collaboration with South Hams and West Devon through the South Devon and Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The district is recognised for its innovation and effective delivery, as illustrated by the following examples. The partnership has been chaired for several years by the Community Safety and Safeguarding Manager at Teignbridge.

Delivery

The CSP establishes its priorities each March, informed by intelligence from the Strategic Needs Assessment, and produces a Local Delivery Plan which is reviewed at each CSP meeting. Teignbridge staff engage daily with policing colleagues and wider partners, including housing providers and the voluntary sector, to address the most significant threats, risks, and harms.

Community Protection Notices

Teignbridge has led the way across the Force area in the use of community protection notices to address antisocial behaviour (ASB) and community safety concerns, issuing 411 warnings with a current compliance rate of 88 percent. While these interventions are traditionally used to tackle ASB such as harassment and nuisance behaviour, an innovative approach has broadened their application to cases involving exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, and stalking. This pioneering practice is being shared with other areas through conference presentations, training delivery, and meetings, helping to highlight the true potential of such interventions in mitigating detrimental impacts on quality of life.

Let’s Talk

Building on insights from work with young people locally affected by gangs and their families, a programme has been developed to engage parents online, raising awareness about community safety risks young people encounter and offering practical tips and techniques for safeguarding. The programme has recorded over 9,000 engagements, with more than 99 percent of delegates indicating they would recommend the course and 85 percent reporting increased confidence in supporting their young person after the session. The remaining 15 percent expressed that they might feel more able. Feedback from parents has included:

- ‘The work being done is vitally important. As a single parent, there has often been a sense of isolation, but this session provided support within just an hour and a half.’
- ‘This has been the best online service attended so far... thank you. Worth every minute.’
- ‘Thank you so much for tonight’s Zoom call – I have already learnt so much and look forward to next week’s session.’
- ‘As a foster carer, the course is greatly appreciated and would also be valuable for prospective adopters.’

Safer Spaces, Safer Places

Supported by the UK Prosperity Fund, Teignbridge has undertaken project work over three years in collaboration with two charitable organisations. Peer researchers, in partnership with young people, have co-designed initiatives to address harmful sexual behaviour and misogyny. The learning from this project has been disseminated across the peninsula through learning events and toolkits. Interventions developed have since been scaled up and funded via Serious Violence Funding, following the presentation of robust evidence regarding outcomes and impact. There is considerable strategic interest in a new aspect of the project focused on engaging boys in primary schools to shift the culture around misogyny, with content co-designed with young people.



Bitesize

Understanding the primary community safety risks is essential for creating safer communities. Regular online awareness sessions have resulted in more than 2,500 engagements, attracting delegates from sectors including education, social work, policing, the voluntary sector, businesses, and town and parish councils. These sessions provide an accurate overview of local issues and, crucially, encourage partners to take action. Topics have included serious and organised crime, domestic abuse, fraud, suicide prevention, stalking, diversity and hate crime, radicalisation, and exploitation. Sessions are now being developed for direct delivery to community members as well as professionals.

Work with schools

Over several years, strong, mutually beneficial relationships have been established with safeguarding leads in secondary schools throughout the area. This proactive approach has facilitated early responses to issues affecting schools and young people. Information shared by schools has also been used to flag strategic concerns to other partners, such as notable increases in mental health concerns, vaping, hate incidents, and misogynistic behaviour.

Partnerships

The partnership model in the area is highly regarded, with strong relationships developed to ensure responsiveness and the ability to bring partners together quickly to devise collaborative solutions to emerging issues.



CASE STUDY

Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission

Ilfracombe in North Devon has long faced significant deprivation and health inequalities. In response, the Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) was established to harness the town's strong sense of community and bridge the gap between those with lived experience of poverty and the civic leaders whose decisions affect them. The Commission's core principle is that lasting change is only possible when people experiencing poverty are at the heart of decision-making.

The PTC brings together "Community Commissioners" (residents with lived experience of poverty) and "Civic Commissioners" (representatives from organisations such as Devon County Council, North Devon Council, Ilfracombe Town Council, North Devon Homes, and the NHS). The Commission operates through regular gatherings, co-designing solutions and sharing power equally between all members.

A key innovation is the "Team Around the Person" approach, which wraps support around individuals with complex needs,



involving family, friends, services, and community resources. The PTC also explores a "No Door is the Wrong Door" model, ensuring that anyone seeking help is always connected to some form of support, even if they don't meet traditional eligibility criteria.

Key workstreams and activities include:

- Housing: The Council involved the PTC in specifying the design of three newly purchased properties, ensuring they meet the real needs of future residents.
- Community Hubs: The Commission is developing a social hub model, building on successful initiatives like the Lantern Centre's Wellbeing Wednesdays. These hubs aim to provide a one-stop shop for advice, peer support, and access to services, especially for those at risk but not eligible for statutory support.
- Staff Training: The PTC is co-producing training resources, such as reflective prompt cards, lived-experience personas, and trauma-informed materials, to improve professionals' understanding of poverty and foster compassionate service delivery.
- Commissioning Standards: The group is developing principles and templates to ensure people don't have to repeatedly share their stories, reducing trauma and frustration.

The PTC's ripple mapping shows that individual changes are leading to organisational transformation. Tangible outcomes include:

- Input into staff induction at North Devon District Council.
- Development of a youth hub.
- Integration with NHS neighbourhood care plans and protocols for people with complex needs.
- Creation of a powerful video, "What Poverty Means to Me," used in staff training and public events.

The PTC's work is reported to One Ilfracombe, the local delivery partnership, ensuring alignment with broader health and wellbeing strategies. The Commission is now focusing on embedding its learning into ongoing projects, with a celebration event planned for December 2025 to share progress and plan for future sustainability.

The Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission demonstrates the power of co-production, compassion, and community-led change. By valuing lived experience and fostering genuine partnership, it is creating practical solutions and shifting attitudes, laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and supportive Ilfracombe.



CASE STUDY

East Devon Place Based Pilot

As part of East Devon District Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy, the need to address poverty has been identified. The district is characterised by a mix of urban and rural communities. While towns have residents experiencing poverty, they benefit from more readily available support networks. In contrast, rural poverty is more dispersed and less visible, yet equally important to tackle.

Residents in rural areas often face greater challenges accessing support networks, with additional barriers such as higher costs for essential goods, reliance on public transport, limited access to essential services, and less provision of mains energy supply. These factors make it harder to address the underlying causes of poverty, particularly given the district's significant rural population. A tailored approach, based on individual community needs, is therefore essential.

To gain a better understanding of the issues faced by rural communities and to identify gaps in existing service provision, a place-based pilot was established in partnership with Devon Communities Together (DCT). This initiative combined community listening and mapping activities to collect valuable insights.

Collaboration with key partners was recognised as vital to fully understanding poverty and achieving positive outcomes for residents. Although various groups exist across public, private, and voluntary sectors, their efforts are not always coordinated to provide a holistic, person-centred response.

Key partners invited to participate included officers from East Devon District Council, Devon County Council, and the Department for Works and Pensions. The voluntary sector was also represented, with members from Learn Devon, Exeter Community Energy Advice, Citizens Advice East Devon, and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) co-ordinator.

The pilot aims to:

- Understand poverty and community needs in different rural areas of the district.
- Assess the availability of both formal and informal assets and support services for community-led support.
- Evaluate how communities access statutory and organisational services.
- Identify ways to support communities in building financial resilience.
- Explore how a place-based approach can complement a person-centred response to create an integrated model that reflects both individual and community needs.
- Determine how professional organisations and the voluntary sector can connect with existing services to address the root causes of poverty more effectively.
- Investigate opportunities for local businesses to support their communities through corporate social responsibility objectives.
- Use insights from the pilot to inform the potential scaling up of this approach across the district and beyond.

Using available data, all partners contributed to identifying the pilot area. With community agreement, DCT conducted engagement sessions. A local voluntary service active in the area was identified through these sessions and invited to ensure local representation within the group.

Regular meetings were held during the engagement period, and an initial findings report will be presented to the East Devon District Council Poverty Panel. There are also considerations to share the report more widely, including with Team Devon.

The next phase of the pilot will focus on addressing the identified issues and exploring ways to scale up support for rural communities throughout East Devon.

Key benefits of our unitary model:

- Eliminates duplication and fragmentation by consolidating services currently split across district and county levels, enabling more coherent and strategic delivery.
- Improves efficiency and performance through shared procurement across the new unitaries, route optimisation, and integration of service delivery—especially in areas like waste, planning, and transport.
- Supports digital transformation with cloud-based systems and integrated data platforms that enhance customer experience and responsiveness.
- Enables strategic housing delivery by aligning planning, asset management, and housing services under one authority, unlocking sites for affordable housing and tackling homelessness more effectively.
- Facilitates environmental stewardship, working with key partners such as Dartmoor National Park and South Devon National Landscapes, through locally owned strategies for climate resilience, biodiversity, and sustainable growth, integrated with housing and transport planning.
- Promotes innovation and scalability by allowing successful initiatives (e.g. modular housing, circular economy models) to be expanded across the new authorities.
- Strengthens partnerships with NHS, police, fire services, and voluntary sector by aligning governance with functional geographies and service footprints.
- Improves preventative service delivery by embedding early intervention and upstream investment into the structure of new authorities, reducing long-term demand.
- Enables joint commissioning and pooled budgets, supporting integrated neighbourhood teams and co-located service hubs.
- Creates resilient organisations with capacity for workforce development and digital infrastructure investment, ensuring future-ready public services.

A solid platform for sustainable transformation

Our model sets up a strong base for long-term change by reshaping how local services are organised and delivered. Instead of just cutting costs, it helps councils work together better and focus on what communities really need. By matching council boundaries with how people live and move around, it makes planning and decision-making more joined-up. This gives councils more freedom to try new ideas, invest in better services, and plan for the future. It also helps shift from short-term fixes to longer-term solutions that can adapt as things change.

Our model provides a robust and future-ready foundation for delivering high-quality, sustainable public services across Devon. By replacing the fragmented two-tier system with three coherent unitary authorities, it enables more integrated, efficient, and responsive service delivery. Our model supports strategic planning and investment at scale, while retaining the local knowledge and flexibility needed to meet the diverse needs of communities. It simplifies governance, reduces duplication, and unlocks opportunities for digital transformation, workforce resilience, and innovation. Crucially, it avoids the disruption and cost creating a new greenfield authority, allowing each new authority to build on existing strengths and deliver continuity from day one.



Beyond structural efficiency, our model embeds a more preventative and collaborative approach to public service. It strengthens partnerships across health, education, and community sectors, enabling earlier intervention and more joined-up support for residents. Local Community Networks and Neighbourhood Area Committees ensure that decision-making remains close to communities, empowering residents, tackling place-based challenges and enhancing accountability. Our model also supports co-located service hubs, building on our existing strong foundations, shared commissioning, and integrated data systems, creating the conditions for long-term transformation, embracing the government ethos and ambitions for wider public sector reform. Our 4-5-1 configuration not only protects what works but creates the space to reimagine how services are delivered, ensuring they are inclusive, resilient, and fit for the future.

This section explores how our model will deliver transformation across critical priorities: Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Place & Environment, Planning, Transport & Infrastructure, Recycling & Waste, and Housing.

Current service delivery

Devon's local government structure comprises a mix of two-tier and unitary arrangements. In the two-tier areas, Devon County Council is responsible for upper-tier services such as education, highways, adult social care, and public health. These services are delivered across eight district councils: East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, South Hams, Teignbridge, Torridge, and West Devon. The district councils manage local services including planning, housing, waste collection, economic and community development.

In contrast, Torbay and Plymouth operate as standalone unitary authorities. Each is responsible for both upper- and lower-tier services within their respective boundaries.

County-wide services such as policing and fire and rescue are delivered across all areas, including the unitary authorities. Devon and

Cornwall Police and the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service operate across the entire county. Health services are provided by multiple NHS Trusts, including the Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, ensuring coverage across both urban and rural communities.

South Hams and West Devon have shared services since 2007, operating with a shared workforce and integrated systems and processes delivering digitally enabled services. Teignbridge collaborates with neighbouring councils on planning and emergency services. Community hubs in towns like Totnes and Newton Abbot co-locate services such as Job Centres and voluntary and community organisations, supporting joined-up delivery and ease of access to services. North Devon and Mid Devon councils operate a shared Building Control service through a joint committee. Similarly, North Devon and Torridge councils have jointly managed crematorium services via a joint committee since 1975.

Workshops

We held a number of extensive structured workshops with key service leads and representatives from across Devon to understand the key challenges they face and opportunities that LGR and our model could unlock. Through a structured agenda participants discussed the challenges they currently face in delivering high quality services to their residents and what current success stories and ways of working they would not want to lose through a reorganisation process.

Service representatives spoke passionately about their desire to improve resident experiences and outcomes, and we listened carefully to the challenges they faced and how they thought the opportunities of wider collaboration and working with communities were a compelling reason to pursue reorganisation. We heard strong desire for creating long lasting, positive working cultures and appetite to learn from and adapt existing best practice examples to their own communities and residents.

Adult social care

Devon, Plymouth and Torbay together serve a population exceeding 1.2 million across eleven local authorities, including Devon County Council, eight district councils, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council. Each authority faces unique geographic and demographic pressures, from rural isolation to coastal ageing, and significant variations in the value of property, the availability of local services and support networks and deprivation levels, yet they share common challenges of rising demand and constrained budgets.

Torbay's demographic profile is skewed with a population that is older than regional and national averages. Over 23 percent of residents are aged 65 and above compared to 18 percent nationally, with 6.4 percent aged 85 or older – a segment forecasted to expand rapidly and drive high-acuity care needs, particularly for dementia and other age-related conditions. Torbay remains a place where people seek to move as part of their retirement, moving to the bay in relatively good health but often drawing on care and support as they age. The Adult Social Care vision is for thriving communities where everyone can prosper – for all residents to have a place to call home in a community they can be a part of while empowered to achieve what matters to them by the best care and support available.

Within Devon County Council, recent self-assessments highlight leadership commitments to person-centred practice, resetting directorate priorities on reducing waiting times, promoting independence, and consistently delivering best practice. Budget realignments and structural redesigns have embedded adult social care as central to corporate strategy, underpinned by ongoing staff engagement and customer feedback loops.

Despite these strengths, budgetary pressures intensify as adults of working age with learning disabilities and mental health needs represent on average ~47 percent of service users yet absorb ~54-57 percent of total

service budgets. If current trends continue, costs are projected to rise by 138 percent by 2036, driven by increasingly complex presentations of mental health and autism.

Key challenges

Public expectations remain high under the SEND agenda, with families and advocacy groups rightly expecting rapid access to high-quality care. Adults of working age with learning disabilities and mental health conditions remain a "hidden" demographic despite their disproportionate impact on budgets and service complexity. The rising complexity and comparative care cost of the most complex young people approaching transition into adult services is challenging the ability of adult care and support providers to offer suitable, resilient long-term accommodation and support.

Torbay's older population and high dementia prevalence drive significant residential and community care costs. Even successful preventative programmes have limited effect on reducing demand among those aged 85+, particularly in coastal and peri-retirement areas.

Interdependencies with housing, education, employment, transport and health services intensify complexity. Supported accommodation markets struggle to keep pace, forcing many to age in place without appropriate retrofits or community-linked support, which in turn increases hospital admissions and pressures on temporary and out of area placements.

The adult social care workforce remains stretched and undervalued. Social care roles are still perceived as "second class, and "unskilled" dominated by a predominantly female workforce which is in itself ageing. Recent recruitment has relied on international workers under skilled-worker visas, but recent visa restrictions threaten to exacerbate staffing shortages, especially in Devon's more rural districts. This is less of an issue in Torbay.

Existing good practice

There are many examples of good practice relating to adult social care delivery, which should not be lost through LGR, scaled up where possible. Torbay's fully integrated health and social care trust has become a national exemplar and co-designing supported housing stock in partnership with GSK when commercial providers were absent. The Torbay relational social care model places strong emphasis on building trusting, ongoing relationships between individuals, their families, and care professionals, ensuring that support is tailored, responsive, and rooted in the lived experience of those accessing services.

Across Devon there are pockets of innovative community initiatives such as One Ilfracombe, One Holsworthy, and One South Devon which harness local volunteer and VCSE networks to deliver hyper-local support that complements statutory services. Within Torbay the Torbay Community organisation supports a vibrant connected voluntary sector and includes Community Helpline, run by a bay-wide collaboration of VCSE partners, resolves 86% of calls without needing onward referral to adult social care. This infrastructure provides a comprehensive voluntary sector offer across the Torbay footprint.

Mid Devon's council-led housing model demonstrates how rapid, locally funded development can meet specialist housing needs, setting a blueprint for scalable expansion. Torbay's carers benefit from one of the most comprehensive local offers in England, spanning peer networks, short-break services, and dedicated support teams including a presence in every primary care network, reinforcing the "Torbay model" as a beacon in adult social care. Across both footprints, integrated management structures ensure that commissioning, reablement, and performance management operate on unified data platforms.

Future transformation opportunities

Our 4-5-1 configuration unlocks transformative potential in housing and community support. Councils can scale up their own supported-living stock, blending safe, independent homes with wrap-around community services. By aligning housing functions with adult social care, we can better tackle homelessness through early intervention, minimise reliance on expensive temporary placements, and free up capacity in high-cost residential settings. Also, embedding key worker accommodation within planning policies can help remove barriers to recruitment, easing workforce shortages and nurturing local talent pipelines.

Beyond bricks and mortar, 4-5-1 fosters a true integrated model of care. Care teams, public health officers, housing officers and VCSE partners will work from a single strategic framework that balances economies of scale with hyper-local agility. Co-production with people who draw on services, their carers, and neighbourhood networks will drive better outcomes at lower cost, tackling social isolation through social prescribing and community-led initiatives. A larger footprint boosts our bargaining power with providers and central government which will improve our market management that drives financial sustainability and quality. Meanwhile, our councils will retain autonomy to tailor workforce development, for example harnessing the apprenticeship levy to grow third-sector capacity and training people in the unique skills needed for our distinct community requirements.

Importantly, our model capitalises on our existing strengths. Torbay's community-led partnerships and Mid Devon's local housing prototype offer proven blueprints for rapid, place-based innovation. Under 4-5-1, these pilot projects can be shared, adapted and scaled, ensuring that best practice is not lost. Aligning with the three NHS systems already anchored in our geographies—University Hospitals Plymouth (1), Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust (4), and Royal Devon and Exeter (5)—creates seamless pathways and alignment to the new unitary authorities. Our model is big enough to secure strategic investment, yet small enough to preserve the community ties and personalised relationships that underpin key delivery aspects of adult social care.

CASE STUDY

Community Protection Warning (CPW) Project

Early intervention and multi-agency collaboration in East and Mid Devon

In East and Mid Devon, two brothers aged 15 and 18 had been involved in antisocial behaviour, assault, and burglary. Their situation reflected a growing concern about youth offending and the risks of escalation if left unaddressed. Recognising the need for tailored intervention, local agencies came together to develop a comprehensive support plan for the siblings.

The approach was multifaceted and avoided formal criminal sanctions. The brothers were offered access to a local gym and work opportunities, which provided positive outlets and structure. At home, supervision was increased to foster a safer environment, and alternative education was arranged through the Poles Apart program. Additionally, the ABC and Safer Me Plans were put in place to further support their wellbeing and monitor progress.

Over time, these interventions led to a significant reduction in offending and an improved home environment. The brothers engaged positively with the opportunities presented, demonstrating the effectiveness of early and contextual safeguarding measures.

Disrupting exploitation and community impact

Parallel to this, authorities issued a Child Protection Warning (CPW) at a property known for child drug exploitation. This action successfully disrupted the activity, as no further reports or intelligence of exploitation were received at the location.

Across East and Mid Devon, a total of 76 CPWs were issued, achieving a 92% compliance rate. Of these, 30 specifically

targeted the prevention of serious violence. The results underscore the power of early intervention in preventing escalation and avoiding criminal sanctions. Critical gaps were identified, particularly during periods of school transition, prompting a redesign of services and communication approaches to better accommodate neurodiverse youth.

Lessons learned

- CPWs proved to be a powerful tool for early intervention, with high rates of compliance.
- Collaboration among multiple agencies enhanced the effectiveness and sustainability of outcomes.
- Interventions tailored to the individual and family were more successful in changing behaviour.
- Contextual safeguarding emerged as essential in strategies addressing youth antisocial behaviour.

Recommendations

- Continue using CPWs as a frontline intervention for antisocial behaviour.
- Expand training for partner agencies to strengthen collaborative approaches.
- Develop targeted support for youth during school transition periods.
- Embed neurodiverse-friendly strategies in all communications addressing antisocial behaviour.
- Formalise the Youth ASBIP as a strategic multi-agency forum to sustain and scale successes.

CASE STUDY

Domestic abuse data analysis led service design in Torbay

In Torbay, the challenge of supporting victims of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) was brought into sharp focus by the statutory Safe Accommodation needs assessment, a requirement of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This assessment revealed critical gaps in both the availability of safe accommodation and the provision of tailored support—especially for LGBTQ+ individuals. The removal of local connection criteria meant that more people fleeing abuse would need emergency accommodation, and the existing system was not equipped to meet this demand.

Recognising the urgency, Torbay's leaders joined forces with the Peninsula-wide "EOS" group, a coalition of commissioning and strategic leads from Plymouth, Devon, Cornwall, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and NHS Devon. Together, they sought not only to expand the number of safe accommodation units but also to address the unique needs of LGBTQ+ victims, a group often overlooked in mainstream services.

Opportunity arrived in the form of Ministry of Justice grant funding. Through a collaborative bid led by the OPCC, Torbay secured resources to launch a Devon-wide LGBTQ+ domestic abuse support service. Cornwall, too, obtained funding for a parallel service. The Intercom Trust, a regional specialist, was contracted to develop what would become the "Safer Rainbow" service; a pioneering, "by and for" initiative that quickly gained recognition as a vital resource for victims of domestic and sexual violence.

The practical work began with Torbay's long-standing partner, Sanctuary Housing, which manages the council's former social housing stock. Leveraging this relationship and working closely with the commissioned

domestic abuse service within Sanctuary's supported care arm, the team sourced and equipped eight additional dispersed, self-contained safe accommodation units. These units were specifically designed to help victims avoid or minimise time spent in emergency temporary accommodation, offering a stable and supportive environment at a critical moment in their lives.

The results were immediate and profound. Utilisation rates for the safe accommodation units averaged 90% in 2024/25, and feedback from residents was overwhelmingly positive. In a 2024 survey, every respondent rated their experience as "very good"—the highest possible rating. Residents spoke movingly about the impact: "It relieves a lot of stress knowing I have somewhere safe to go until I find my permanent home," one shared. Another reflected, "Feeling safe and my children being able to be themselves. No longer feeling anxious all the time. Sleeping better." For many, the safe house was not just a refuge, but a place to rebuild: "Finding myself again as a woman and awareness of never to be abused again," wrote one survivor.

Meanwhile, the Safer Rainbow service grew rapidly. In its first year, a single Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) supported 41 people. By 2024/25, the team had expanded to two trained IDVAs, one also a qualified ISVA, each holding full caseloads of around 21 clients. The service's reach extended to 169 people in a single year, with referrals coming from self-referral, Intercom's own advocacy and helpline, and other professionals. The complexity and intersectionality of clients' needs became clear, with many presenting neurodiverse conditions, learning difficulties, or histories of childhood sexual abuse. For LGBTQ+ survivors, having a service that truly understood their context was transformative.

One client's letter captured the essence of the service's impact:

"Your kindness, guidance, and dedication have been a lifeline during an incredibly challenging period of my life... [The IDVA] has supported me tirelessly through my recovery journey, helping me come to terms with and cope better with the trauma of domestic abuse. Her empathy, patience, and professionalism have made a profound difference in my healing process... Intercom Trust has been the one organisation that has consistently stood by me, offering stability and compassion when I needed it most."

The story of Torbay's response to domestic abuse is one of collaboration, innovation, and compassion. By listening to data, acting on evidence, and focussing on the voices of those most in need, the community not only filled gaps in provision but set a new standard for inclusive, survivor-led support. The Safer Rainbow service has since attracted national attention, including from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, as a model for others to follow.



Children's services

Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council together support approximately 225,000 children and young people across Devon (aged 0–17), from urban centres to deeply rural communities. Nationally, about 3% of England's 12.7 million children live in the social care system at any one time; Devon, Plymouth and Torbay mirror this trend, placing roughly 5,100 children (2.3%) under statutory social care plans. In March 2024, Ofsted's monitoring visit to Devon County Council praised strides in early help, improvements in partnership working and a renewed focus on outcomes for children, while emphasising the need for greater consistency in assessment and casework practice. However, Ofsted ILACS inspection published on 13 May 2025 rated Devon County Council's Children's social care services as "Inadequate". Feedback from those with more recent insights indicate that improvements are being made by Devon County Council in the delivery of children's services, but these have not yet tracked through into inspection outcomes. Meanwhile, Torbay's inspection highlighted robust early years support through Family Hubs, strong neurodiversity provision co-produced with families and an effective Mental Health in Schools team and an overall Ofsted ILACS "Good" rating from March 2022. Plymouth was rated "Requires improvement to be good" in 2024.

The three authorities face mounting financial pressures. Prior to joining the government's Safety Valve programme, Torbay reported a children's services deficit of £12.9 million, targeting a balanced budget by 2026/27. Devon County Council's Safety Valve Agreement commits to reducing its Dedicated Schools Grant deficit, which is forecast to peak at £160.9 million by the end of 2025/26 and taper to £144.9 million by 2027/28 through a combination of targeted reforms and Council contributions. Plymouth reported budget variation of around £5m forecast overspend related to placement costs of children in Plymouth's care in August 2024. These deficits compound an increasingly complex service environment driven by demographic shifts, rising need and market volatility.

Key challenges

A long-term decline in birth rates across Devon strains the sufficiency model for early years and school provision, yet pockets of high demand – notably in parts of East Devon – are seeing rising birth rates that outpace new school capacity. This divergence complicates strategic planning, with some districts forecasting overcrowded classes while others face under-enrolled schools and shrinking budgets.

Families are presenting with ever-more complex needs: parental mental health issues, substance misuse and domestic abuse incidents are all climbing, triggering a surge in statutory interventions in some areas. Conversely, Torbay are seeing a decrease in statutory interventions, with the increase in demand coming from family help. At the same time, children's social care remains at the mercy of the open market for placement sufficiency – geographic shortages of foster carers and specialist homes push costs upward and force out-of-area placements that break vital community ties.

Workforce fragility is acute in early years, where low pay and minimal professional recognition hinder recruitment and retention, limiting wraparound childcare and perinatal support. Schools across the county grapple with funding gaps, rising pay bills and falling pupil numbers, forcing some to reduce frontline services just as demand for alternative provision escalates. Agency staffing costs in Devon and the wider South West remain among the highest in England, further eroding tight budgets.

Youth Justice Services and exploitation-prevention teams are chronically underfunded, even as referrals for child exploitation and criminal exploitation peak. The complexity of young people entering care has intensified; many require highly specialist provision – including secure welfare placements and therapeutic foster care – at significantly higher cost.

Reforms such as the Better Start for Life agenda and new statutory duties around perinatal mental health are important steps forward yet

demand for specialist practitioners far outstrips available supply. Referral rates for child and adolescent mental health services continue to climb, with waiting lists growing and early intervention capacity limited.

Economic inactivity among young people remains stubbornly high. In Torbay, only 55 percent of care-experienced young adults are in education, employment or training after school, and many of those achieving strong GCSE (KS4) results relocate for work or study. This out-migration reduces local talent and weakens community resilience.

Education systems are under strain from widening gaps in exclusions and suspensions, and the SEND agenda casts a long shadow over mainstream provision. Devon and Torbay both have higher proportions of children requiring special educational needs support than the national average, placing them within the safety-valve framework for high-need authorities. Devon and Torbay must deliver ambitious deficit-reduction plans alongside improved outcomes.

Finally, securing permanent housing for care-experienced young people presents a persistent barrier to stable transitions to adulthood. Local availability of supported lodgings and affordable tenancies is scant, risking homelessness and repeated crisis interventions.

Existing good practice

Torbay's turnaround from an "Inadequate" inspection to a "Good" overall rating stands as a testament to concerted leadership, relational practice and strong community partnerships. Central to Torbay's rapid improvement has been the thorough embedding of a social care model rooted in relational practice—an approach that prioritises building trust, understanding and genuine partnership with children, families and professionals. This model is woven through every layer of Torbay's services, underpinning decision-making, interventions and workforce culture. It has fostered a climate of mutual respect and accountability, leading to swifter, more sustainable outcomes for children

and families. Devon County Council is now beginning to introduce relational practice as a core element of its approach. As we seek unified improvement across a larger, targeted geography, it is imperative that we build on Torbay's model within our proposed 4–5–1 structure. Adopting and scaling this relational approach will ensure consistency, accelerate improvement across all communities, and avoid the pitfalls of fragmented or transactional service delivery.

Across the past five years, Torbay has sustained balanced children's services budgets through rigorous financial discipline and targeted investment in early help. Family Hubs, jointly commissioned with Public Health and Action for Children, provide a cradle-to-five "first port of call," integrating home-learning environment teams, perinatal mental health support and peer-led breastfeeding programmes. Innovative offers such as "Breathing Space" for birth removals and on-site birth registration exemplify Torbay's cradle-to-career commitment.

Torbay has also reduced its number of cared for children through robust placement sufficiency management, deploying in-house mapping of foster carer supply and securing agreement to progress on building two new children's homes owned by the council but delivered by the VCSE sector. Its universal free school meals scheme—the only local authority to have an auto-registration programme in the South West—ensures seamless uptake. Preventative speech and language interventions, co-delivered by the local authority and NHS, address early communication issues before they escalate. In-house drug and alcohol services for young people fill a vital gap in the market.

Early Help Partnership Boards and multi-agency safeguarding hubs are embedding cross-discipline accountability, and the county's learning academy for the children's wider workforce including social care is accelerating workforce development through in-house training and restoration of permanency for agency social workers.

Future transformation opportunities

Our proposed 4-5-1 structure offers the scale to drive market stability, workforce development and data-driven commissioning, while preserving the hyper-local relationships that underpin excellent early help and community safety work. Centralised commissioning of placements and specialist education provision will stabilise costs and ensure sufficiency across the footprint, shortening travel times for children and strengthening ties to schools and families.

Councils working across their distinct communities can build Family Hubs at scale,

extending Torbay's cradle-to-five model into wider communities. Pooling apprenticeship and training levies across five mid-tiers will grow third-sector expertise, from therapeutic foster care to youth justice prevention, and reduce reliance on expensive agency workers.

Our unified authorities will broker large-scale partnerships with further education providers and employers, creating joined-up pathways into work and apprenticeships for care-experienced young people. This will tackle economic inactivity by keeping talent local and giving young people a stake in their communities.

Integration with Place services—housing, community safety, tenancy support and public health—will enable co-located hubs for all age groups, including young futures hubs for teenagers at risk of mental health crisis or exploitation. True community hubs will weave together tenancy services, domestic abuse support, youth justice outreach and family support under one roof.

Through our model, we can ensure accountability and tailoring of services to local needs while the strategic element to our larger unitary footprint will secure economies of scale in commissioning, IT platforms and data analytics. This balance of scale and locality will help us expand supported housing for care-

experienced young people, retrofit homes for SEND families and deliver public health-led initiatives such as winter warmth upgrades.

Finally, the relational culture that propelled Torbay's turnaround—accredited restorative practice, no-blame learning academies and a focus on converting agency staff to permanent roles—can be woven into every unitary and adapted where local priorities require adaptations in approach. A collective learning academy will drive continuous improvement, embedding restorative and relational practice. Under 4-5-1, innovation travels faster, best practice is shared seamlessly, and every community benefits from the deep expertise we have built.



CASE STUDY

Family Hubs

In Torbay, the Family Hubs model is comprised of three main hubs, each supported by a broader network to ensure families have straightforward access to a wide array of services. These hubs deliver the core Family Hub offer, which includes support for infant feeding, perinatal and infant mental health, parenting and child development programmes, and home learning resources. Additional assistance is available for matters such as the cost of living, housing, and employment (through the DWP), as well as access to SENDias and section 23 notifications. The co-location of various services underpins the “tell it once” vision, reducing the need for families to repeat their stories to multiple agencies.

For instance, the integration of maternity, health visiting, and speech and language services within Torbay's Family Hubs creates a more efficient and accessible journey, allowing families to connect with several professionals in a single, familiar environment. This approach enhances collaboration among professionals, resulting in quicker referrals, shared assessments, and more coordinated support—particularly

beneficial for children with emerging developmental needs or SEND. Co-location also makes it easier to identify issues early, such as speech delays or parental mental health challenges, enabling prompt and effective intervention.

The impact of Torbay's Family Hubs is evident in measurable improvements in early years outcomes. Breastfeeding rates at the 6–8 week health check have risen significantly and now exceed the national average. There has also been a 5–8% increase in the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception Year, reflecting the positive influence of early learning and parenting interventions. Early mental health support has advanced considerably, bridging a critical gap where previously only crisis intervention existed, and now offering unique provision for mild to moderate mental health needs in both parents and infants—support not available elsewhere locally.

Families consistently express that they feel supported at the right moment, with services that are responsive to their circumstances and have a meaningful impact on them and their extended family network. This positive feedback underscores the value of the collaborative model in effecting significant change and delivering improved outcomes for children, including those with SEND.

CASE STUDY

Free school meals

Many children in Torbay face daily food insecurity, making Free School Meals (FSMs) a vital source of hot, nutritious food. Recent data from the School Census shows that 5,362 out of 20,119 school-aged children in Torbay receive FSMs—over one in four—highlighting significant deprivation in the area. Particularly concerning is the high proportion of younger children eligible for FSMs, suggesting that deprivation is increasingly affecting the most vulnerable.

To address barriers such as digital poverty and literacy challenges that prevent families from applying for FSMs, Torbay introduced an auto-enrolment process. This system identifies eligible children whose families have not applied and automatically enrolls them, unless they opt out. As a result, 234 additional children—representing a 4% increase—were identified and granted FSMs. Torbay stands out as one of the few local authorities outside London to implement this approach, and the only one in the South West at this stage. The success of the initiative led the Torbay Business Intelligence Team to assist a neighbouring authority in embedding a similar process.

Data illustrates the spread of FSMs across age groups and school stages, with notable increases among nursery and primary-aged children. Auto-enrolment’s impact is also evident at the school and ward level, with the largest gains in Torquay’s most deprived wards. For example, Barton with Watcombe, Ellacombe, and St Marychurch wards saw the highest numbers of newly enrolled children.

The financial implications for schools are substantial. Each FSM-eligible child attracts Pupil Premium funding—approximately £1,515 for primary and £1,075 for secondary students. Before auto-enrolment, Torbay schools received £7,059,510 through the Pupil Premium. The auto-enrolment process generated an additional £300,214, raising the total to £7,359,755. These funds support educational interventions and resources for disadvantaged pupils.

Beyond daily meals, FSM eligibility grants children access to the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme, funded by central government. The programme provides physical and creative activities, as well as nutritious meals, during school holidays for the most vulnerable children, helping bridge the gap in opportunities and standards of living.

Analysis of the auto-enrolment data highlighted gaps in FSM identification among younger children. In response, Torbay is exploring the extension of FSM provision into early years settings through the Better Start in Life Programme. This presents challenges, as early years care in Torbay is predominantly delivered by private providers and childminders, with no established model to follow. Nevertheless, a proof of concept is being developed, with the aim of piloting the approach in a small number of early years settings and possibly rolling it out more widely if successful.

In summary, Torbay’s innovative approach to FSM provision has increased uptake, drawn down additional funding, and provided broader support for children in need. The auto-enrolment process has positioned Torbay as a regional leader and a model for other local authorities seeking to address child poverty and improve educational outcomes.

CASE STUDY

Breathing Space

Breathing Space is a support service available to any parent residing in Torbay who has experienced permanent separation from their child or children, underpinned by research undertaken locally in 2022–2023. Support is offered to mothers and fathers, whether as a couple or as individuals, and engagement with the service remains voluntary.

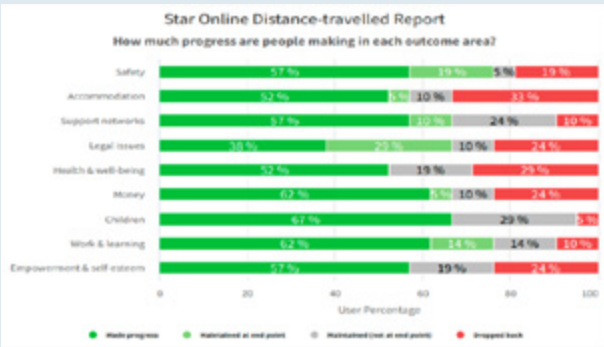
The approach is parent-led, promoting autonomy and self-determination through relationship-based practice, with a foundation in trauma-informed methods. The aim is to assist parents in rebuilding their lives and reaching their individual potential, with support provided both on a one-to-one basis and within groups. It is essential for parents to understand that engagement with the service does not serve as a pathway towards having their child or children returned to their care but rather is designed to help them become the best version of themselves and achieve stability in their lives. Through participation, vulnerabilities that could undermine future capacity to care for children may be addressed.

Service Aims:

- Reduce the prevalence of repeat child removals in Torbay.
- Relationships developed with parents offer a foundation to rebuild lives after the traumatic experience of separation from their child.
- Parents are empowered and encouraged to access statutory and community services, promoting sustained positive change and long-term independence.

Since its launch in November 2023, Breathing Space has received 81 referrals, with service criteria confirmed for 74 of these. Work with 40 parents has concluded during this period, and currently 15 engagements remain active. With a recent expansion in team capacity, the number of active engagements is expected to rise to 40 parents.

Service Performance



Housing

Front door keys unlock far more than just a place of shelter; they provide a sense of safety and security, some stability in a chaotic world, and a foundation on which to build a better set of life outcomes. Housing that is not attainable, affordable or appropriate, leads to poorer outcomes for individuals and families, as well as higher direct and indirect costs for public service providers.

The lack of coordination between stock-holding authorities and the absence of a unified approach to strategic land use have limited the ability to respond to both local needs and national priorities. Devon's housing pressures vary significantly—from affordability challenges in Exeter and South Hams to under-delivery in Torridge and North Devon—yet the current governance model lacks the coherence to address these disparities effectively. By strengthening collaboration between authorities and strategic partnerships, there is an opportunity to link skills and training in construction, particularly through Exeter



College, to enhance housing delivery in North Devon for example. This coordinated approach would address the construction skills gap and enable local talent to contribute directly to meeting housing demand, ensuring that both immediate and long-term needs are met more effectively across the county.

Key challenges

Across the Devon system, it is well known that housing pressures are exacerbating our structural challenges in fuel poverty and social mobility. In parts of Devon, life chances and social mobility are among the very worst in the country. The quality of housing can also be very poor. This bakes in hardship, impacting on educational attainment for our young people, as well as leading to increased health impacts for our older and more vulnerable population. Together with salaries far more likely to be lower than average, the affordability ratio in most of Devon is extremely challenging.

Data sharing between authorities is limited, constraining the ability to develop integrated housing and health strategies. Vulnerable residents frequently fall through the gaps, receiving support only after problems escalate. The lack of strategic oversight also hampers innovation in housing design and delivery, including modular construction, zero-carbon homes, and community-led development. Without a coherent framework, efforts to address housing need remain reactive and fragmented.

One of the major challenges facing the proposed '4' unitary area is the extensive coverage of National Park and National Landscapes, together with topographical, flood risk, and biodiversity constraints. These factors significantly limit the availability of land for development and require careful management to balance growth with environmental protection. Notably, much of South Hams's growth is intrinsically linked to Plymouth, while similar patterns are evident in Teignbridge and Exeter. Addressing these issues will necessitate strategic spatial planning at the MSA level, ensuring that development is both sustainable and sensitive to local environmental considerations. This topic is explored in greater detail in **Criteria 6**.

Existing good practice

Across Devon, there are strong examples of place-based innovation and partnership working that demonstrate the potential of a more integrated approach. In the South unitary, Teignbridge's "Homes for Teignbridge" programme delivers social rent housing using available land, while Torbay's "Hotels to Homes" initiative repurposes accommodation to tackle fuel poverty. Disabled Facilities Grants and GP referrals for heating support are helping to embed early intervention and prevention, enabling residents to remain in their homes for longer. The area's ability to link housing with business growth and social mobility is strengthened by its focus on local needs and partnerships with health and care providers.

Our proposal draws together the stock-holding councils of East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, alongside North Devon who have recently started acquiring their own stock again, in order to maximise their impact locally. This would create a new authority with a stock of around 12,000 council houses, leading to significant opportunities for economies of scale across maintenance, retrofit and new social housing delivery, as well as being able to deliver the maximum management savings by combining all councils with Housing Revenue Accounts.

Place-based initiatives such as "One North Devon" and "One Ilfracombe" have successfully replaced bedsits with quality housing, illustrating the impact of collaborative, locally driven approaches. The region's focus on rural affordable housing, land trusts, and modular construction sets a strong example for others, demonstrating how strategic coordination and local expertise can drive meaningful change. The Futures Partnership in Northern Devon brings together representatives from registered providers and the NHS, recognising the critical role of housing in health prevention and fostering integrated local systems. In Torridge, the Community Regeneration Partnership has worked with Westward Housing to retrofit homes for energy efficiency, which in turn has freed up resources to acquire new social housing from developers – a circular intervention that multiplies community benefit.

East Devon been delivering the new town of Cranbrook since it started on site on 2011. Today, Cranbrook is home to a population of around 9,000 people with this due to increase to 20,000. The key strategic proposal within the Local Plan review is to bring forward a second new town, Marlcombe. By 2030 the area will be in the unusual position of delivering two new town concurrently which will ultimately support a population nearing 50,000 people. There has been considerable learning from Cranbrook which is now being applied to the planning and delivery of Marlcombe. This includes moving forward with the establishment of a dedicated delivery vehicle in the form of a Development Corporation. Marlcombe was recently short listed by the New Towns Taskforce as one of twelve potential locations nationally.

In the southern unitary, our proposal would bring together expertise and experience of working with and through the full range of registered providers in the area, as well as ensuring that all the knowledge of working in the context of Dartmoor National Park was retained within the new council's housing and planning function.

Councils in Devon have award-winning experience in delivering retrofit programmes, in clienting housing construction schemes, and in tackling anti-social behaviour in partnership with neighbourhood policing, social workers and mental health service providers. Our proposal will allow these skills to be shared across the new authorities to ensure maximum positive impact, while positioning them to support devolution via the CCA and delivery of the spatial development strategy.

Plymouth has developed a housing strategy that links directly with its defence and marine industries, supporting workforce retention and community stability. This approach is underpinned by the city's adoption of initiatives such as the growth dividend model, ensuring that the benefits of economic development are reinvested into local communities through improved housing provision and infrastructure. Furthermore, Plymouth's 'Plan for Homes' initiative demonstrates this joined-up thinking, delivering innovative housing solutions and accelerating delivery

to meet local demand. The integration of housing, health, and economic development in Plymouth offers a blueprint for joined-up service delivery, demonstrating how strategic planning, supported by mechanisms like the growth dividend and the Plan for Homes, can simultaneously achieve social outcomes and drive sustainable economic growth.

Future transformation opportunities

The proposed 4-5-1 unitary model offers a transformative opportunity to reimagine housing delivery across Devon. By bringing together housing, planning, and asset management under a single authority, the new structure will enable more effective use of land, better coordination of investment, and a stronger focus on meeting local needs. Strategic land management across housing market areas will unlock sites for affordable and sustainable housing, while integration with health and care will support prevention and early intervention.

Stock-holding authorities within the new configuration will be able to scale best practice and respond more effectively to local needs. Innovation in modular and zero-carbon housing will be supported by shared expertise and coordinated investment, while responses to homelessness and fuel poverty will be strengthened through local partnerships and integrated service models. The expanded footprint of the new authorities will also address the challenge of miscommunication between asset disposal and strategic direction, ensuring that all councils have a clear understanding of their assets and priorities.

By aligning housing delivery with broader place-based strategies, the new unitaries will be able to tackle affordability, improve housing quality, and support inclusive growth. Vulnerable residents will benefit from earlier support, and communities will see more responsive, sustainable housing solutions. Our model provides the scale, coherence, and strategic capacity needed to deliver a step-change in housing governance—ensuring that every resident has access to safe, affordable, and appropriate housing.

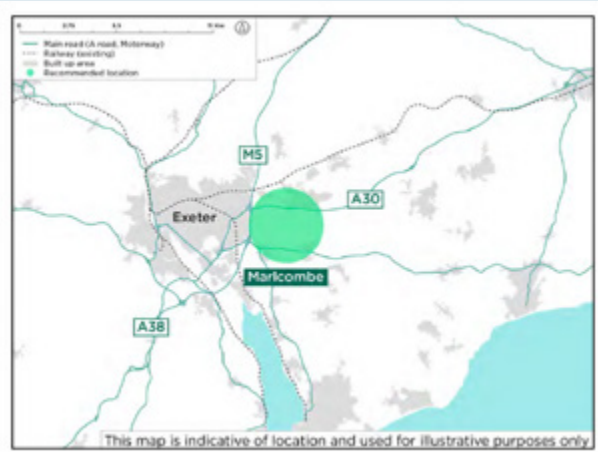
CASE STUDY

New Towns Taskforce recommendations for Plymouth and Marcombe, East Devon

The New Towns Taskforce report, published in late September 2025, identified twelve locations for the UK’s next generation of new towns, including two distinct proposals for Devon:

- Marcombe in East Devon;
- a proposal for Plymouth.

These recommendations aim to accelerate housing delivery, unlock economic growth, and create sustainable, well-connected communities.



Marcombe, East Devon: a new standalone settlement

The Taskforce recommended Marcombe as a **standalone settlement** to be located between the A30 and A3052, immediately south of Exeter Airport. The primary objectives for Marcombe are:

- **Housing Delivery:** To deliver **8,000 new homes** initially, rising to **10,000 in the long term**, with a key target of **40% affordable housing**. This high proportion of affordable homes is intended to specifically address the local housing crisis, particularly for young people and families.
- **Economic Growth:** The town is positioned to **strengthen the region’s labour supply** and directly support the growth of the **Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone**, a hub for clean growth technologies.
- **Placemaking and Infrastructure-First:** The recommendation stresses the need for a **vibrant, resilient, and well-connected town**, not just a collection of houses. Crucially, it advocates for the **early and integrated delivery of essential services and infrastructure** (schools, health facilities, community hubs, sustainable transport links) in step with housing construction. This approach explicitly draws on lessons learned from the development of Cranbrook, an earlier new community in East Devon where services lagged behind housing.
- **Delivery Mechanism:** East Devon District Council has signalled its intention to use a **Development Corporation** to oversee the project, which is consistent with the Taskforce’s overall preference for strong, single delivery vehicles to ensure greater control over planning and infrastructure provision.

Plymouth: densified urban development

In contrast to the new greenfield settlement at Marcombe, the recommendation for Plymouth focuses on **densified development**—an approach involving urban regeneration and expansion within an existing city structure. The key aims for Plymouth are:

- **Urban Evolution:** The recommendation is framed as “evolving Britain’s Ocean City.” This involves **densification** to meet housing demand while ensuring high-quality, high-density living.
- **Capitalising on Investment:** The development is intended to capitalise on the government’s significant **£4.4 billion investment in HMNB Devonport**, Western Europe’s largest naval base, ensuring housing and services support the city’s role as a major economic and strategic hub.
- **Shared Principles:** Like Marcombe, the Plymouth proposal is expected to adhere to the Taskforce’s overall **placemaking principles**, which call for mixed-tenure housing, long-term stewardship, and excellent transport connectivity (including active travel routes).

The government has initially welcomed both sites, alongside the 10 others, and committed to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and public consultation before final decisions are made on which locations will proceed.

CASE STUDY

Housing and Community Safety Programme in North Devon

North Devon Council (NDC) has taken significant steps to address housing challenges through its Housing and Community Safety Programme. This initiative encompasses a range of projects aimed at meeting local needs, improving living conditions, and ensuring resident well-being. In May 2025, NDC adopted a new Housing Strategy following substantial public consultation, which now serves as the blueprint for housing functions in the area. The council subsequently registered as a Local Authority Registered Provider of Social Housing, a milestone after 25 years, with 24 units currently in development and further projects being pursued with support from Homes England.

Under the Healthy Homes initiative, NDC is developing housing schemes in Barnstaple and Ilfracombe, offering 10 and 14 units respectively, funded by the Future High Street Fund and the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority. These efforts are guided by input from the Poverty Truth Commission and Community Commissioners to ensure the new homes address the needs of those in unhealthy conditions. Residents can access support directly from a Housing Officer at the Ilfracombe Centre on Tuesdays, and the Housing Options Team actively works on an average of 32 new cases weekly. Early intervention is encouraged for those at risk of homelessness, while the team also provides advice on issues such as rent arrears, utility bills, and energy efficiency in collaboration with organisations like 361 Energy.

Further support is available at the new customer service hub in Barnstaple’s Green Lanes Shopping Centre, offering face-to-face housing advice during the week. Government-funded schemes provide home improvement grants, insulation, and low carbon heating upgrades for low-income homeowners and tenants, while energy efficiency grants and loans help reduce household bills. The Enhanced Outreach team continues to support rough sleepers, helping them transition into permanent accommodation and ensuring ongoing welfare support. Through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, NDC assists Ukrainian refugees and sponsors, and participates in Refugee Week to celebrate community diversity and resilience. Lastly, the Empty Homes Project tackles the issue of long-term vacant properties, increasing housing supply, and reducing property nuisance by working with owners and partners like Lendology. Residents have frequently expressed their appreciation for the Housing team’s efforts, acknowledging their dedication and impactful support.



CASE STUDY

Hotels to Homes

With little or almost no affordable housing available throughout Torbay, and a lack of greenfield and brownfield sites, another approach was needed to create affordable homes for residents. Following the closure of large hotels in prime locations, Torbay decided to partner with developers to convert these buildings into affordable housing for local key workers and those with the greatest housing need.

Torbay is home to numerous hotels, many in picturesque locations, which are no longer in operation and have stood empty for extended periods. Many of these Victorian-era buildings are architecturally impressive and offer excellent potential for residential conversion.

A £3 million investment from the Levelling Up Partnership with Government enabled the ‘Hotels to Homes’ initiative, bringing affordable housing to those with the highest need. The first project required an exceptionally quick turnaround, so Torbay sought a hotel in central Torquay that already had planning permission and a developer ready to move forward. By

adopting a turnkey approach for this initial project, Torbay harnessed the strengths of both the public and private sectors: achieving the speed and flexibility of a private developer while maintaining the public sector’s commitment to community benefit. By agreeing to purchase the entire development at once, both parties saved on multiple legal fees, eliminated the need for an estate agent, and secured a guaranteed buyer for the developer, along with a bulk purchase discount.

Torbay’s involvement ensured higher standards of accommodation, including a fire suppression system, EPC Level B, low carbon heating, solar panels, electric vehicle charging points, and space for a shared garden.

This former hotel now provides 14 individual units, including flatlets, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom flats, accommodating single people, couples, and families in the heart of the town, just steps from the beautiful seafront and beaches.

This pilot project has become the blueprint for the broader Hotels to Homes programme, with additional projects already underway. Torbay’s ongoing investment in housing and the local community aims to give residents homes they can truly call their own.

CASE STUDY

South Hams and West Devon – relocating housing requirements for optimal delivery

Another example of effective cross-boundary collaboration is the ability to shift a portion of West Devon's housing requirement into South Hams through the Joint Local Plan (JLP), focusing on areas with stronger prospects for sustainable delivery. Encouraging growth in the more accessible western end of South Hams also helps address housing needs for new households forming in the southern part of West Devon, as the redistribution remains within the same local housing market area.

The advantages of allocating housing numbers across a broader area diminish once different housing market areas are involved, since this would mean relocating people away from their established communities and support networks. The structure of a combined south and west Devon authority spans only two distinct housing market areas, allowing for redistribution of housing requirements while respecting the unique identities and cohesiveness of local communities.

CASE STUDY

Ilfracombe Healthy Homes – delivery of 14 homes, Ilfracombe central ward

North Devon Council (NDC) secured £1.98 million from the CCA to pilot the delivery of Healthy Homes in Ilfracombe. The innovative approach enables the purchase of poor-quality accommodation, which NDC refurbishes and then lets as an ethical landlord, using surplus income to repeat the model.

Three properties have been acquired, with planning permission sought to convert 12 bedsits into six one-bedroom flats and to remodel a further four long-term empty units into eight new residences. The accommodation design benefited from insights provided by the Poverty Truth Commission. Individuals with direct experience of poverty and substandard housing contributed to the design process, ensuring solutions addressed issues such as poor insulation, opportunities for communal activity, and energy cost reduction.

The resulting scheme will provide 14 social rented units in the most deprived ward in the county. This development represents the second tranche of Affordable Social Housing to be added to the portfolio since NDC became a Local Authority Registered Provider (LARP), marking the first time social housing stock has been held since 2000. As a result, all five now are LARPs.



CASE STUDY

Bicclescombe Nursery site, Ilfracombe – 16 social rented homes

The Bicclescombe Nursery site in Ilfracombe tells a compelling story of transformation, from a stalled development opportunity to a beacon of community-led housing innovation. Owned by North Devon Council (NDC), the site had previously been marketed for housing but failed to attract viable interest. Despite its potential, the project was deemed unviable, and the land remained dormant in one of the most deprived areas of the district.

Determined to unlock the site's potential, NDC took a bold and collaborative approach. Planning permission was secured for the development of 16 social rented homes, and the scheme was designed in partnership with stakeholders to ensure it met local needs. Recognising the power of community ownership, NDC Members agreed to transfer the land to the Ilfracombe Community Land

Trust (CLT) at nil value, a significant gesture that placed the future of the site directly in the hands of the local community.

To further support the project, NDC successfully bid for £500,000 from the Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF). This funding enabled the council to procure and deliver the enabling works, which have now been completed, removing key barriers to development and making the site ready for construction.

The next phase of the project involves finalising a contract with a Registered Provider (RP) to deliver the 16 social rented homes. Once built, the homes will be held in freehold by the Ilfracombe CLT and managed by the RP, ensuring long-term affordability and professional oversight.

This initiative not only delivers much-needed affordable housing but also exemplifies how local authorities and communities can work together to address housing challenges. In a district grappling with deprivation and housing inequality, the Bicclescombe Nursery site stands as a model of resilience, innovation, and hope.

CASE STUDY

Regulated housing transformation programme, East Devon

With the change of leadership within the Housing Directorate, came the realisation for a need to transform the regulatory housing service within EDDC. Initially, a fundamental review of the staffing structure was undertaken with a specific focus on leadership and management positions. This resulted in the recruitment of a number of key appointments with expertise from the housing sector.

After a period of review and analysis of performance measures, further recommendations were made to the Executive Leadership Team, Housing Review Board and members with a specific targeted approach to reducing risk, improving standards and reducing the financial vulnerability of the HRA.

One key element of this process was to ensure there was transparency between officers, members and tenants alike: ownership and accountability for performance issues, a willingness to share information, and most importantly mechanisms to listen to lived experiences and ways to improve.

The service was in need of fundamental review to meet customer expectation, new consumer standards and ever-developing legislative requirements. Some of the key steps that were taken are outlined below, although this list is not exhaustive:

- Introduction of key tenant engagement services & review of tenant engagement on all governance and scrutiny committees resulting in a 21.9% increase in tenants feeling satisfied with how EDDC keep them informed about things that matter to them.
- Development of Housing Strategy with positive and meaningful consultation process.
- Review of financial situation; spend analysis, reintroduction of programmed and planned works, reduced overspend, review of capital/ revenue allocation. We have reduced the planned use of HRA reserves by over £400k in FY 24/25, from £1.75m to £1.33m. Projected outturn for 25/26 sees reserves replenished by minimum £250k.
- Immediate plan introduced to reduce risk within compliance performance. Regulator for Social Housing approved the plan and outcomes and confirmed compliance.
- Contract Management review to improve relationships and value for money with all contractors, introducing robust KPI and performance monitoring.
- Cessation of contracts that were not meeting standard.
- Review of all policies and procedures.
- Significant investment in staff training and development.
- Ongoing performance management and recruitment processes to ensure the right people were in the right roles.
- Stock Condition Survey completed; validation and scrutiny of results to ensure accuracy and reliability. We have 6.5% decency failure, against a sector average of over 11% failure. Confirms stock condition in strong position for HRA ongoing viability and investment.
- Instruction to key leading experts (CIPFA, Savills, ARC) for review and advise on key areas of process, planning and stewardship.
- Building relationships across EDDC and with other key external partners to improve standards, efficiencies and effectiveness. This has seen, for example, a 17.6% increase in satisfaction with ASB case handling.
- Review of complaints process to improve performance in Tenant Satisfaction Measures with key focus on person centred approaches to dealing with customer enquiries and reduction of response times. E.g.: Stage 1 response times currently down to av. 8 days, from over 50 days in FY 24/25.
- Positive engagement from June 2024 with the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) to introduce new leadership team and demonstrate direction of travel and share project plans.
- RSH inspection conducted between April 2025– June 2025 with C2 judgement outcome published on 30th July 2025.
- Build and Buy Plan approved at Cabinet August 2025; ambition to build/ buy 500 new homes in 5 years.
- 30-year Business Plan and Asset Management Strategy plan underway ready for April 2026 launch with key targets to reach 15% savings cuts across the HRA within 5 years (assuming LGR implementation in yrs 4/5). The plan demonstrates negative outturn of previous trajectory, and positive impact of new and proposed practices and delivery that secure viability of HRA.

Since receipt of the C2 judgement, a Transformation Strategy is under development to work towards the achievement of a C1 judgement in due course. The Housing Management Project team are in place to oversee the programme delivery, with key targets on service improvement, strengthening the financial viability of the HRA and developing key opportunities that LGR presents.

Other key figures/statistics of note:

- Significant improvement in void performance:
 - Av Days to Relet – YTD 65.4, down from 207.44 at end of FY 23/24, and the lowest they have been in 5 years.
 - Current no. Of Void Dwellings – 85, down from a peak of 184 in May 2023.
- Improvement in Tenant Satisfaction Measures, against a national trend of decreasing satisfaction. Including overall satisfaction at 60%, up from 52% in previous year.
- Consistent upper quartile performance in rent collection (over 100%), strengthening viability of HRA financial position.



Place and environment

Devon's landscape is both its greatest strength and its most complex challenge. The county is defined by extraordinary geographical diversity—from the wild uplands of Dartmoor and Exmoor to the rolling farmland of Mid Devon and South Hams, and from the vibrant city of Exeter to the iconic English Riviera and the UNESCO Biosphere of North Devon. This rich tapestry of place demands a public service model that is rooted in locality, one that recognises and responds to the unique assets and challenges of each area.

Under the current two-tier system, the stewardship of place and environment is frequently undermined by fragmented responsibilities and misaligned priorities. Local plans, environmental strategies, and regeneration initiatives can miss opportunities for joined-up action as a result of a lack of strategic coherence. Stakeholders across Devon have consistently emphasised the need for integrated approaches that reflect local identity and environmental priorities, rather than generic, top-down solutions. This can be best addressed in our 4-5-1 model given the distinction between the place and local Nature of the proposed Northern and Southern Unitaries.



Key challenges

The existing governance arrangements present several barriers to effective environmental management and place-making. Fragmentation across tiers has led to disjointed planning and delivery, with local authorities often pursuing separate agendas that fail to align with broader strategic goals, although recognising that the delivery of housing is highly complex and cannot rest solely on local government structures; even with robust Local Plans in place, significant challenges persist due to misalignment with the investment cycles and infrastructure plans of key utilities and agencies such as National Grid Electricity Distribution, South West Water, the Environment Agency, and National Highways, often making the costs and coordination of necessary infrastructure prohibitive.

Devon's ambition to deliver on climate, biodiversity, and net zero targets is also hampered by the lack of scale and coordination. Significant landscapes such as National Parks, Biosphere Reserves, and National Landscapes are not consistently integrated into planning frameworks, risking degradation and underinvestment. Coastal and rural communities face distinct environmental and economic pressures, yet these are not adequately addressed under the current system, which lacks the flexibility and responsiveness to tailor interventions to local needs.

Existing good practice

Despite these challenges, there are strong foundations on which to build. South Hams and West Devon have demonstrated the benefits of cross-boundary working through joint local plans and regeneration partnerships. Torbay's English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark stands out as a national exemplar of place-based environmental management, supporting both conservation and a thriving visitor economy. In the north, the North Devon Biosphere provides a unique model that integrates environmental stewardship with economic strategy, enabling sustainable development across the region. The South East Devon Habitat Mitigation Partnership has helped to demonstrate how significant levels of new housing development

can successfully be accommodated in close proximity to internationally designated habitat sites without comprising their integrity through a combination of enhanced site management measures the large-scale provision of new, publicly accessible greenspace.

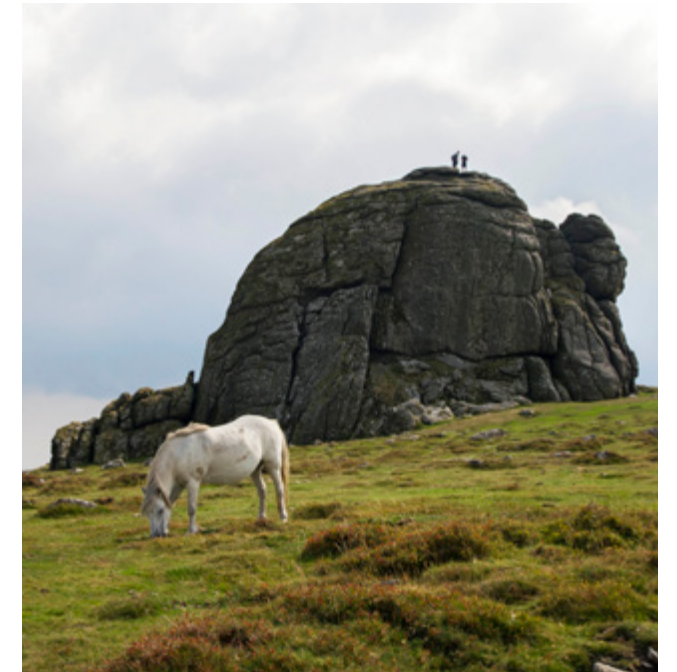
Current efforts to tackle National Park curation in Dartmoor include initiatives such as the 'Digital National Park' project, which aims to enhance connectivity and access for rural communities, as well as partnerships focused on developing social housing and supporting the park's long-term 'Vision for Dartmoor'.

The Northern Devon Futures partnership exemplifies regeneration through place-based collaboration, bringing together local authorities, businesses, and communities to deliver sustainable growth. Plymouth's leadership in marine innovation and its designation as the UK's first National Marine Park highlight the power of focused, place-based environmental strategy. The city's joint working with South Devon on transport and environmental planning further demonstrating that Plymouth and the surrounding area collaborate successfully as neighbours.

Future transformation opportunities

Our unitary model offers a transformative opportunity to reimagine the stewardship of place and environment across Devon. By aligning governance with natural geographies and functional economic areas, each authority will be empowered to develop a clear, locally owned narrative for place and environment. This will enable the creation of integrated spatial development strategies that transcend artificial boundaries and unlock the potential of both urban and rural areas.

These new structures will support the protection and enhancement of natural capital, combining the scale necessary to deliver on climate, biodiversity, and net zero ambitions with the local knowledge required to tailor interventions to each landscape. Strategic regeneration of brownfield sites will become more feasible, and growth can be planned in a way that respects the unique character of each area.



In the South unitary, Dartmoor brings a strong rural dimension, supporting both environmental stewardship and rural service delivery. South Hams and West Devon's history of collaboration provides a solid foundation for integrated planning, while Torbay's coastal assets and environmental leadership offer a model for sustainable tourism and marine conservation. The North unitary, encompassing North and East Devon and Exeter, will be able to coordinate across the greater Exeter area, enabling a holistic approach to place-making and environmental protection and the delivery of strategic green infrastructure projects, such as the planned Clyst Valley Regional Park. Plymouth, as a retained unitary, will continue to lead on marine innovation and urban environmental strategy, working in partnership with neighbouring authorities to ensure regional coherence.

Our model also enables stronger partnerships with national bodies and local stakeholders, supporting the delivery of net zero ambitions and nature recovery strategies. The expanded footprint provides opportunities to protect natural areas and build housing strategically, aligning with the region's environmental protection agenda. By bringing together the right partners, aligning strategies, and focusing on the needs of each place, our model will ensure that Devon's landscapes are not only protected but enhanced for future generations.



CASE STUDY

Dartmoor National Park and National Landscapes

Dartmoor National Park (DNP) and the South Devon National Landscape (SDNL) cover a combined 499 square miles and are home to a population of approximately 70,000 residents. They play a key role in promoting and protecting their unique landscapes, environment, economies and communities.

The geography of the new authority under our 4-5-1 model would encompass the whole of DNP (bar one very small area that will seek to incorporate via a boundary modification) and the SDNL. This logical alignment of boundaries will help support shared strategic and environmental priorities including DNP’s ‘Vision for Dartmoor’.

Existing initiatives including partnerships to develop social housing underline the potential and our proposal would open up the opportunity for devolving powers, responsibilities and further joint working efficiencies, for example, the expansion of the ‘Digital National Park’ delivering greater connectivity for rural communities.

Reinforcing the independence of DNP and aligning with the DEFRA objective to reduce the size of political representation of the park authority, can be facilitated through changes to existing governance arrangements. Current arrangements see 10 local authority members, from 4 different Councils, on DNP out of a total of 19. It is proposed that with one authority this could be reduced to six members. This representation would be made up of three portfolio holders presenting priority area – environment, planning and economy – and three members who represent wards within the park. In addition, this would create space on the park authority to appoint additional technical experts and champions of the park’s statutory purpose and wider ambition. Such an approach would further the national park purposes in line with the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act while also supporting and promoting rural interests, including agriculture, across the wider authority. A better alignment of governance arrangements with fewer parties, will improve the clarity and focus of the



emerging and future management plans, enhancing the critical role of the national park as a custodian of the environment.

SDNL are hosted by, and share strategic priorities with, South Hams DC through the alignment of their Management Plan and the adopted Council Plan. This place-based approach would be further reinforced as SDNL will be largely contained within the new authority’s boundary and therefore benefit from streamlined governance arrangements and longer-term financial commitment to support the many shared priorities.

Consideration could also be given to the Dartmoor National Park (DNP) and whether an Neighbourhood Area Committee would work or, given the separation of planning functions, it may be better suited to a Local Community Network covering it’s geography or a Joint Board set up to support the strategic aims of both organisations that would report back to both DNP and the new authority.



CASE STUDY

The North Devon UNESCO Biosphere

The issue of water quality is one which faces every community across the UK. But it is in northern Devon where a multi-partner approach is truly leading the way to create a replicable model for catchment-scale water quality and flow transformation.

The North Devon UNESCO Biosphere is leading on an initiative funded by The Crown Estate, North Devon Council and Torridge District Council to develop a bottom-up roadmap focused on achieving Good Ecological Status across all 95 river water bodies in northern Devon.

This collaborative effort will unite key system actors – including local communities, district and county councils, landowners, the dairy sector, South West Water, and environmental regulators around a single, integrated plan.

The project will be underpinned by the Smart Biosphere data platform, which includes MHCLG-funded innovations such as a bathing water sensor buoy at Westward Ho!. Aligning with the North Devon and Torridge Clean Maritime Growth Vision and the Biosphere’s Marine Delivery Roadmap the work aims to strengthen existing leadership within the sphere of environmental intelligence and impact.

The programme will showcase best practices in intervention prioritisation, community engagement, funding mechanisms, and impact measurement – reinforcing Northern Devon’s position as a hub for natural environment innovation with a recognisable international brand.

CASE STUDY

East Devon National Landscapes

East Devon is characterised by a high quality of environment. National Landscape designations cover 66% of the district alongside the coastline being part of England's only Natural World Heritage Site – the Jurassic Coast. The East Devon National Landscape (EDNL) and Blackdown Hills National Landscape (BHNL) projects highlight the significant efforts and achievements in preserving and enhancing the natural environment in East Devon.

The combined budget for EDNL in 2024/25 was £736,960, with £480,391 allocated to specific projects. The EDNL Communities Project Fund supported 11 projects, including biodiversity improvements, water quality plans, and tree planting. The East Devon Farmers Group held 10 events for over 113 landowners and land managers, focusing on topics like slurry management and sustainable farming. The EDNL nature engagement program led 11 events attended by 209 adults and 57 children, and the Access for All program supported 8 projects to improve accessibility. The EDNL Partnership also collaborated on the 'Nature Calling' project and supported 44 projects through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

The BHNL had a total budget of £1,595,000 for 2024/25, with £1,242,000 allocated to specific projects. The BHNL Project Fund supported 16 projects, including a heritage festival, hybrid taxi purchase, and compost toilets for a Community Interest Company. The Blackdown Hills Farmers Group held 9 events for over 130 landowners and land managers, covering topics like soil health and river restoration. The BHNL Access for All programme supported 6 projects, including electric charging points and nature connection groups. The BHNL also participated in the Generation Green



Farming in Protected Landscapes farm talk – Blackdown Hills National Landscape



Nature Calling project engaging local communities with wildlife – East Devon National Landscape



River Runs Through Us project – Blackdown Hills National Landscape

2 project, providing nature connection experiences for young people. The BHNL Farming in Protected Landscapes program supported 63 projects worth £526,039.

Both EDNL and BHNL are involved in the 'Rivers Run Through Us' project, aiming to restore the natural heritage of the Axe River through strategic themes of River, Soil, and People.

CASE STUDY

Natural capital

East Devon District Council is actively involved in managing and delivering natural capital through both its natural assets and also ecosystems services. This is done through:

1. Natural assets:
 - Management of 12 Local Nature Reserves that are diverse in habitats from lowland heaths to inter tidal marsh to ancient semi natural woodlands.
 - More formal green spaces in urban/peri-urban settings such as Community Nature Reserves and Suitable Areas of Natural Greenspace (SANGs) that deliver for both wildlife and people.
2. Ecosystems services:
 - This includes internal processes that actively help deliver mitigation and adaption for EDDC's climate change strategy. This includes a programme of tree planting, the creation of wildflower meadows in our parks and supporting our natural flood defences in Seaton with the creation of new inter tidal habitats (Seaton Wetlands).
 - The nature reserves also provide important cultural services which include opportunities for recreation and the linked health benefits both physical and mental. It is a proven fact that access to nature provides huge health and wellbeing benefits.

Natural capital projects and programmes in East Devon

These services in East Devon DC are delivered through place-based activities such as **the River Axe SAC Local Nutrient Management Fund programme**. This is a £4.2 million funded initiative that will deliver a range of nature-based solutions to tackle the high levels of nutrients/phosphates in the River Axe Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The objective is to bring the River Axe SAC back into 'favourable condition' and help support improvements in its water quality and also the biodiversity it supports. This is also a multi partnership initiative working with Dorset Council, Somerset Council and Natural England to tackle nutrient issues in a wide locality-based catchment area.

The award-winning **Seaton Wetlands managed by EDDC's Countryside team** delivers a range of ecosystem services through the creation of inter tidal habitat that provides both a natural solution for flood capacity storage and also an important habitat for over wintering birds. The town of Seaton suffers from 'coastal squeeze' through rising sea levels, new development and increased flooding and the Wetlands reserve helps to mitigate these impacts. The reserve also attracts over 100,000 visitors a year and provides an important "cultural service" in terms of access for all, 10km of publicly accessible footpaths and infrastructure such as birds hides and viewing platforms.

Water vole release programme – Seaton Wetlands



Knapp Copse Local Nature Reserve & County Wildlife Site (EDDC managed site)



CASE STUDY

South West coastal monitoring

In 2006, on behalf of the South West region, Teignbridge District Council began hosting the newly formed South West Coastal Monitoring (SWCM) programme, taking responsibility for managing and delivery of the programme.

SWCM is part of the National Network of Regional Coastal Monitoring Programmes (NNRCMP) and has been providing a standard, repeatable and cost-effective method of monitoring the regional coastal environment for nearly 20 years. As the largest programme in the network, it monitors over 2,400 km of the South West coast, from Portland Bill to the Welsh border (Figure 1). Designed as a ‘spend to save’ initiative, its ‘capture once use many times’ methodology provides an 8:1 benefit-cost-ratio compared to the cost of each authority



individually procuring and managing similar products. The programme receives £9.7m funding for the six-year phase 2021-2027.

SWCM collects data of the coastal region including aerial photography, bathymetry (seabed mapping), beach topography, LiDAR (height models), habitat mapping, weather and marine data such as tides, wave heights and direction. The high-quality data is gathered, quality assured and managed by SWCM coastal process scientists based at the University of Plymouth which is then shared with shared via the NNRCMP. It is made available free of charge via <http://southwest.coastalmonitoring.org> under the terms and



conditions of the Open Government Licence. SWCM coordinate communication and working groups across the Risk Management Authorities, for example, the Coastal Change Management Area working group.

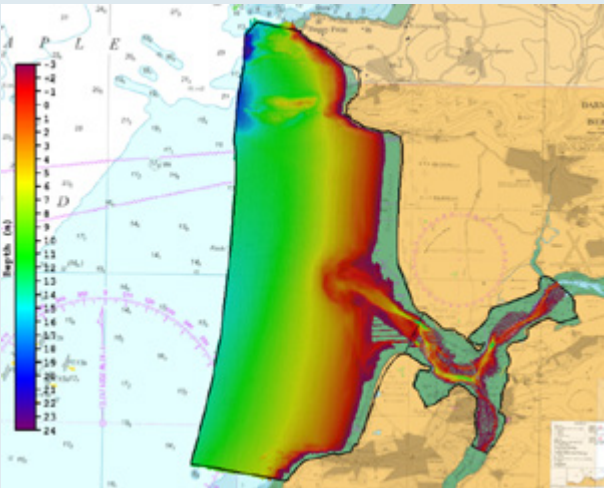
SWCM is relied on as an essential service across the South West, providing a long-term evidence dataset for FCERM (Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management) teams in both Local Authorities and the Environment Agency. The data, such as beach profiles or storm data, provides insights supporting the development of shoreline management plans (SMPs), numerous coastal defence strategies (including large infrastructure programmes such as Network Rail), operational management of coastal protection and flood defence assets, academic papers and supporting coastal communities. Its data was integral to the latest refresh of the Environment Agency’s National Coastal Erosion Risk Map (NCERM). The Met Office use the SWCM near shore wave buoy data to validate and improve shipping and surge forecasts.

The benefit to the South West is immense. It supports post storm incident response with surveys and can save funds on beach re-profiling where SWCM data shows the beach will naturally recover. Its near shore wave buoys provide operational response early warning, helping Risk Management Authority officers refine their response options. The Environment Agency use the real time information, alongside Met Office forecasts, to prepare flood warning advice to the public. For example, at Weston super Mare the wave buoy data of wave height, wind speed and direction inform tidal gate closures. For southern Cornwall, Devon and Dorset, the Isles of Scilly wave buoy gives valuable hours’ notice for approaching storm conditions.

The longevity of the data collection is increasing confidence in modelled predictions and forecast conditions. For the £16.5m Torbay coastal adaption studies and schemes, SWCM data worth £450k (notably, the wave buoy data) minimised potential over-design of defences and provided assurance to coastal engineers regarding unnecessary spend on beach replenishment.



SWCM dashboard highlighting coastal change at Dawlish Warren



Bathymetric data of Bideford Bay – crucial in understanding the sediment around the area off Westward Ho! and Saunton Sands.

To deliver all the above SWCM runs numerous contracts: in 2025 there were 14 contracts running concurrently with a value of £4.2m. Although the contract and financial management is located at the Teignbridge office in Newton Abbot, the SWCM coastal scientists are at the University of Plymouth. This ensures excellent links with academia, enabling the free flow of educational information from early years to ‘A Level’ and beyond to pre and post graduate collaboration, helping to prepare students for their long-term future. Teignbridge’s ongoing hosting has supported a long-term close relationship with the Environment Agency. Teignbridge has provided stability for the SWCM, ensuring that the team members are supported, providing assurance for procurement and contract management and leading on FCERM evidence collection across the South West.

CASE STUDY

Teignbridge Carbon Action Plan

A series of successful bids under the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme secured £3.3 million of Government funding to deliver heat decarbonisation and energy efficiency projects across the five most energy-intensive buildings, including four leisure sites and the main offices at Forde House. These projects have reduced fossil fuel use by 2.3 million kWh, equivalent to heating approximately 200 homes and amounting to 87% of gas consumption measured within the Scope 1 Carbon Footprint. The focus has been on major interventions, such as replacing gas boilers with heat pumps, fabric improvements, heat recovery systems, and rooftop solar PV.

The latest project at Broadmeadow Sports Centre re-opened to the public in July 2025 following a 40-week full refurbishment. In-house expertise, in collaboration with consultants, overcame complex structural challenges to deliver a modern facility fit for the future. The upgraded centre now offers increased gym and studio capacity, greater opportunities for exercise and health and wellbeing benefits, and enhanced income potential. Leisure memberships are currently at the highest level on record.



Carbon Action Plan – vehicle fleet

Building on the success of heat decarbonisation projects, priority actions from the Carbon Action Plan have been delivered to develop decarbonisation pathways for the vehicle fleet, which accounts for around half of the direct Scope 1 carbon footprint. The fleet includes vehicles ranging from 26-tonne refuse collection vehicles to 3.5-tonne environment warden vans.

Collaboration with the Energy Saving Trust led to the development of fleet replacement and electric vehicle charging infrastructure plans. The first phase of fleet electrification launched in 2024, replacing twenty diesel vans with electric equivalents. The electricity supply at the Forde Road Depot was upgraded with a one-megawatt grid connection, providing sufficient capacity for future fleet electrification and aligning with the UK's sixth Carbon Budget.

The latest carbon footprint assessment for 2024/25 indicates that the project is on track to achieve the business case energy and carbon savings. Based on the first six months of operation, the electric vehicles have contributed to fuel savings equivalent to driving a hatchback around the world eight times. Ongoing collaboration with the Energy Saving Trust will ensure plans remain up to date and support the next phases of the electric fleet journey.

Local Plan 2020–2040

The Local Plan 2020–2040 has introduced new climate change policies covering resilience, sustainable transport, energy efficiency, and renewable energy generation. These policies position Teignbridge to limit further contributions to climate change and curb emissions in Devon.

Following a rigorous process drawing on in-house expertise and expert advice, the Local Plan 2020–2040 was inspected in Autumn 2024, resulting in minor modifications and broad acceptance of the core climate change policies by the Inspector. These policies



are now being applied to live planning applications ahead of Plan adoption, expected around New Year 2025/26.

The new policies mandate energy efficiency standards that outperform the national timetable for the Future Homes Standard. New homes will be built to net zero standards, and commercial buildings are expected to achieve BREEAM Excellent standard by default.

Onshore wind allocations are included within the Local Plan, alongside policies for renewable energy and energy storage, creating favourable conditions for growth and investment in low-carbon technologies and capitalising on Devon's renewable energy resources.

Teignbridge is also the first Local Authority in Devon to produce a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, shaping priorities to increase active travel provision at all scales, from town centre pavement improvements to district-wide long-distance proposals, including the Teign Estuary Trail.

Through the District Carbon Action Plan, the delivery of Local Plan policies will continue to be embedded and enhanced by engaging with developers and partners, investing in staff knowledge and tools, and learning through ongoing implementation as the district progresses towards net zero.

Planning, transport and infrastructure

Planning, transport, and infrastructure form the backbone of sustainable growth and social inclusion. They shape how communities connect, how economies thrive, and how services reach those who need them most. However, under the current two-tier system, these functions are too often fragmented, reactive, and disconnected from the realities of how people live, work, and travel. This has resulted in a patchwork of planning systems and infrastructure strategies that not only fail to meet the needs of both growing urban centres and isolated rural communities but also contribute to delays in providing the essential infrastructure required to support housing growth.

Stakeholders across Devon have consistently highlighted the limitations of the current arrangements. Misaligned planning systems, limited digital integration, and a lack of strategic advocacy for infrastructure investment have created inefficiencies and duplication. The division of responsibilities between district and county councils has led to missed opportunities for joined-up transport, housing, and economic development. There is a clear and urgent need for unified governance that can deliver integrated spatial strategies, advocate effectively for investment, and ensure that infrastructure planning is responsive to local needs.

Key challenges

The current governance model has resulted in a lack of coherence across planning and infrastructure services. Disjointed responsibilities have led to duplication of effort, inconsistent standards, and limited capacity to deliver strategic infrastructure projects. Digital enablement remains underdeveloped, with planning and transport services often reliant on outdated systems and siloed data. This has hindered the development of customer-focused services and constrained the ability to respond to changing demands.

There is also a lack of strategic advocacy for infrastructure investment. Devon's diverse

geography requires tailored solutions, yet the current system struggles to present a unified voice at regional and national levels. Neighbourhood planning is frequently disconnected from infrastructure funding, resulting in growth that is neither inclusive nor sustainable. Staff recruitment and retention pose additional challenges, with smaller authorities unable to offer the career pathways and organisational stability needed to build resilient, future-ready teams.

Existing good practice

Despite these challenges, there are strong examples of innovation and collaboration across Devon. In the South unitary area, Torbay is aligning Adults and Children's services onto a single system, demonstrating the benefits of integrated digital infrastructure. Investment in environmental protection is helping to mitigate the impact of growth on protected areas, while regeneration partners are actively developing brownfield sites to support sustainable development. The area's commitment to circular economy solutions is underpinned by strong local partnerships and a culture of innovation.

In the North unitary, the rail link between Barnstaple and Exeter is a key asset, supporting connectivity and economic integration across the region. Partnerships with further education providers such as Petroc and Exeter College are enhancing transport links and improving bus services, while localised planning is strengthening connectivity in Exmoor and rural North Devon. The area's infrastructure links with Exeter, including a hard border with Somerset, offer significant opportunities for strategic investment and growth, including through the ongoing delivery of the Devon Metro concept.

Joint work between Plymouth and neighbouring areas in South Devon on transport planning, including railway timetabling and dockside employment, demonstrates how integrated strategies can balance urban and rural priorities. Plymouth's role in the future Mayoral Strategic Authority would further strengthen its ability to represent the needs of diverse communities and advocate for regional infrastructure investment.



Future transformation opportunities

Each unitary will be able to tailor strategies to the unique characteristics of its geography, ensuring that infrastructure and transport services are not only efficient but also responsive to local demands. This will enable digital infrastructure improvements, with cloud-based systems and integrated data platforms supporting more efficient, customer-focused delivery. Investment in staff development will build resilient teams capable of responding to the challenges of a rapidly changing world, while reducing single points of failure and improving organisational stability.

Neighbourhood planning will be closely linked to infrastructure funding, ensuring that growth is inclusive and sustainable. Authorities will be able to coordinate planning and investment across housing, transport, and employment, creating joined-up strategies that support economic development and social inclusion. The scale and coherence of the new unitaries will also support innovation, enabling the development of circular economy models, smart infrastructure, and integrated service hubs.

The Devon Housing Commission also provides a strong foundation for addressing the county's housing needs through collaborative action. Through an enhanced partnership with Homes England, there is significant potential to unlock a pipeline of large-scale housing sites and accelerate delivery. This collaboration will support the development of a Strategic Housing Plan for Devon, ensuring a coordinated approach to meeting future housing demand and driving sustainable, inclusive growth across the region.

By aligning governance with functional geographies and service footprints, our model will empower each new authority to speak with a unified voice at regional and national levels. This will strengthen Devon's position in infrastructure negotiations, attract investment, and ensure that the county's diverse communities are represented in strategic planning. Ultimately, our model provides the foundation for planning, transport, and infrastructure services that are efficient, responsive, and future-ready – delivering better outcomes for residents and supporting sustainable growth across the region.

CASE STUDY

South Hams and West Devon – Thriving Towns and Villages (TTV) policy area in the adopted Joint Local Plan (JLP)

The TTV policy area applies across South Hams and West Devon and allows decision makers to use the same suite of policies in both areas to deliver sustainable development outcomes. The TTV was created based upon the shared rural typologies of both South Hams and West Devon, which combines large areas of rural landscapes with thriving rural settlements.

This approach could be replicated to extend into other adjoining district councils such as Teignbridge, where similar challenges and

opportunities exist as they do in South Hams and West Devon.

Our experience of applying a sub-regional approach to proactively dealing with the growth demands that occur at the interface of a large urban area and the surrounding rural environment – as seen in the Plymouth urban fringe – could apply just as effectively in the areas where Torbay abuts South Hams and Teignbridge.

Crucially, the two large urban ‘bookends’ of Plymouth and Torbay make the spatial characteristics of south and west Devon distinct and different to the rest of the county and allow us to apply the type of sub-regional spatial planning principles that do not apply in the more rural north and east of the county.

**CASE STUDY**

Appledore Clean Maritime Innovation Centre – a research and development space for next generation sustainable maritime initiatives

Opening in late 2026 the £18.7m Appledore Clean Maritime Innovation Centre will provide a critical R&D hub for maritime technologies with a clear focus on delivery for industry need right at the gateway to the Celtic Sea. From clean propulsion to autonomous vessels, maritime cyber security, aquaculture, environmental intelligence, and floating offshore wind operations and maintenance technologies the region will be at the heart of the sector's growth over the next 10 years.

Established as a National Centre of Excellence by the National Shipbuilding Office, and with direct water access for testing and deployment in the Taw-Torridge Estuary and wider Celtic Sea via a slipway and near 100m quayside, the innovation centre is located adjacent to Navantia's Appledore Shipyard, reinforcing the region's shipbuilding legacy and future potential. At the heart of that potential is the need to commitment to working in partnership, positioning the South West at the forefront of the industry.

Featuring 6 quay-level workshops, office space, and collaborative breakout space and meeting rooms the centre will address the significant need for R&D space in the sector as well as providing a critical point of focus for the growing maritime industry along the coastline while also directly building pride and ambition in the local community, working with skills providers to shape the next generation of maritime workforce.

CASE STUDY

Cranbrook town development

The Devon Structure Plan identified an area of search for a new town on the western side of East Devon, strategically located proximate to major transport infrastructure and the city of Exeter. East Devon had experienced sluggish housing growth and housing was becoming more unaffordable and in 2010 planning permission was granted for a new town, to be known as Cranbrook.

The first residents moved into Cranbrook in August 2012, delivering 30% affordable housing overall, including 10% for social rent. Together with other housing sites in the wider growth corridor extending from Exeter, over 5,000 homes were delivered between 2013 and 2023, more than doubling housing delivery from the previous decade. This combined with a large-scale economic development programme led to an improvement in housing affordability



Children at the opening event of the new pump track in 2024, photo credit – Matt Round

(see figure), which had, until this point, been rising since the turn of the millennium. The large upturn in housing delivery also led to a significant decline in the Council’s housing waiting list.

From the outset, priority has been given to placemaking. Using a package of forward funding and working collaboratively with the developer consortium, the first primary school opened when only 30 homes were occupied. This provided a place for the community

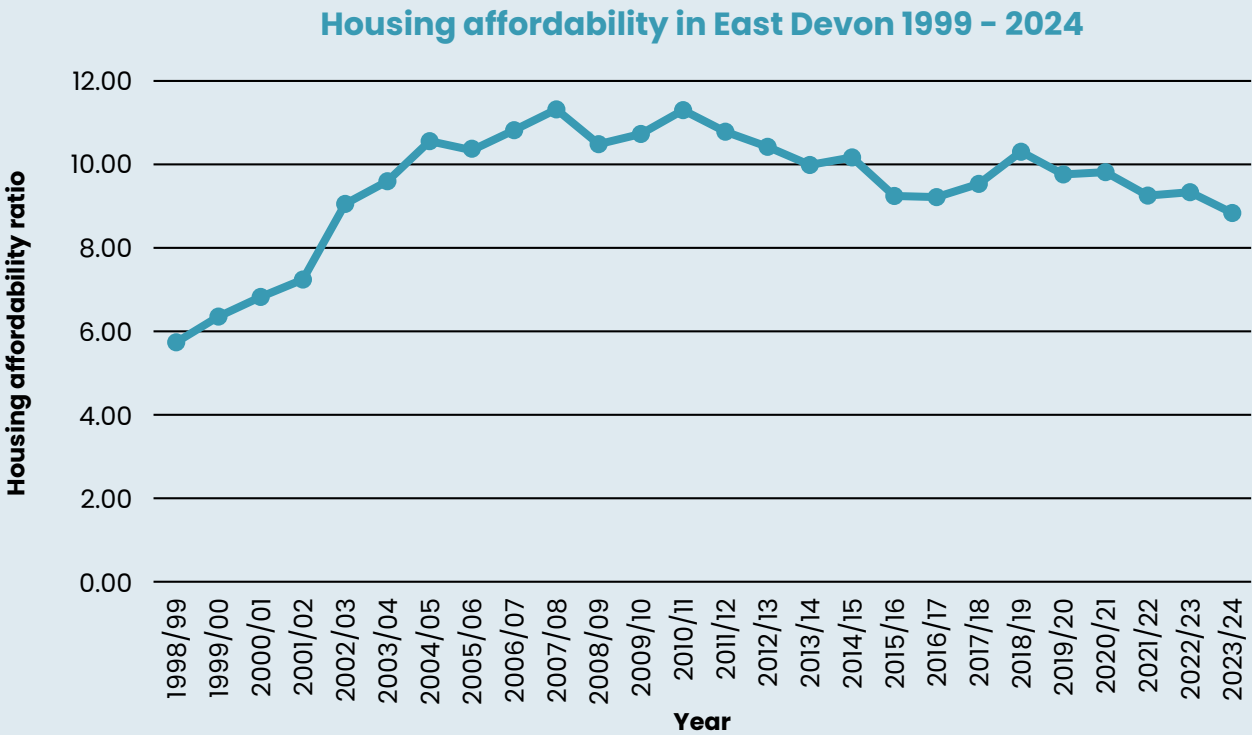
to meet and grow and was supported by a dedicated minister, housed in a parsonage built as a planning obligation and a community development worker also funded by planning obligations.

By the end of 2013 a community building had opened, providing not only space for community events but also as a home for the fledgling Town Council that was established in 2015 and, working with the NHS, a GP surgery. A wider neighbourhood centre opened in 2015, bringing shops and a pharmacy to complement the offer, together with a new railway station. The pharmacy worked with the GP surgery and the NHS Healthy New Towns programme to promote wellbeing among

not only residents but the large number of construction workers in the town.

The collaborative effort to secure the early delivery of social and community infrastructure and support has been crucial for the forging of what has evolved into a community with a strong civic identity and a regular programme of community events. Today, Cranbrook is home to around 9,000 people with a young demographic and a thriving, well-supported community. It stands as a model for how strategic planning, infrastructure investment, and partnership working can deliver both affordable housing and a vibrant new town.

Aerial photo of Cranbrook, June 2025.
© Still Imaging



Housing affordability ratios, source Office for National Statistics

Recycling and waste

Waste management is a critical test of local government’s ability to deliver efficient, customer-focused, and environmentally responsible services. In Devon, performance across recycling and waste services is strong in some areas but inconsistent overall. The current mix of district and county arrangements has resulted in duplication, inefficiency, and missed opportunities for innovation in terms of the waste collection and disposal roles. Strategic coordination is limited, and investment in digital infrastructure and commercial innovation has been uneven, leaving some communities underserved and others operating in isolation.

Key challenges

The fragmented governance model has led to variable performance across the county. Some districts have developed high-performing



waste services, while others struggle with outdated infrastructure, inefficient logistics, and limited access to innovation. The lack of strategic coordination between districts and the county has resulted in inconsistent service standards and missed opportunities for shared investment and procurement.

Digital enablement remains underdeveloped, with many services still reliant on manual processes and siloed systems. This has constrained the ability to deliver adaptive logistics, real-time data, and customer-focused delivery. The absence of a unified strategy has also hindered the development of circular economy initiatives, such as anaerobic digestion and commercial waste expansion, which could provide new sources of funding and support local sustainability goals.

Existing good practice

Across Devon, there are strong examples of innovation and collaboration that demonstrate the potential of a more integrated approach. In the South unitary area, SWISCo’s pilot on food waste behaviour change and the proposal for an anaerobic digestion plant for food waste disposal are leading examples of environmental innovation. These initiatives are supported by strong local partnerships and a commitment to sustainability. Behaviour change pilots are already delivering measurable improvements in food waste capture rates, while the integration of fleet contracting and digitisation projects is enhancing efficiency and resilience.

In the North unitary, East Devon is also recognised for collecting the lowest amount of non-recyclable (residual) waste per household in the country. This is a position it has held for several years. This high performance is a key indicator of the service’s efficiency and residents’ strong participation in recycling. North Devon’s investment in depot infrastructure and performance improvement highlights the benefits of strategic coordination. The proximity of high-performing districts to those with lower performance creates opportunities for best practice sharing and meaningful improvement. Teignbridge ranks in the top 15% nationally for fortnightly waste collection, while East and



Mid Devon are in the top 15% for three-weekly collections. These successes provide a strong foundation for scaling best practice across the new unitaries.

Future transformation opportunities

Our unitary model offers a transformative opportunity to reimagine recycling and waste services across Devon. By consolidating governance into three coherent authorities, our model enables the development of strategic waste partnerships for procurement and policy alignment. This will unlock economies of scale without sacrificing local responsiveness, allowing each authority to tailor services to the needs of its communities while benefiting from shared infrastructure and investment.

Digitisation of waste services will become a priority, with cloud-based systems and integrated data platforms supporting adaptive logistics, real-time monitoring, and customer-focused delivery. Investment in digital infrastructure will improve operational efficiency, enhance service quality, and support the development of future-ready teams.

Our model also enables the expansion of existing circular economy initiatives, including anaerobic digestion, commercial waste services, and reuse and repair schemes. These initiatives will generate new revenue streams and support local sustainability goals.

The expanded footprint of the new authorities will support the introduction of deposit return schemes, fleet decarbonisation, and the integration of waste and recycling services with broader climate initiatives. By aligning strategies and bringing together the right partners, our model will ensure that waste services are not only efficient but also environmentally responsible and resilient to future challenges.

By levelling up performance and sharing best practice, the new unitaries will be able to drive improvement across all areas, ensuring that every resident benefits from high-quality, customer-focused recycling and waste services. Our model provides the scale, coherence, and strategic capacity needed to deliver a step-change in recycling and waste management.

CASE STUDY

South Hams – focused service improvement in waste

A focused programme, resourced from across the business, with political and executive support enabled the Council to take back a failing outsourced service in 14 weeks, improving and stabilising service within the first week, bringing the service to national standards within 4 months and transforming service delivery in 2 years.

In 2018 both Councils carried out an OJEU procurement exercise for their waste, recycling services and street cleaning services. West Devon had been a contracted-out service for 15 years and South Hams ran an in-house service that was perceived as poorly performing for a number of years. A 3-way contract between each Council and FCC (the existing West Devon contractor) was recommended by the member led procurement board and agreed by both Councils to commence from April 2019.

The specification included the enhancement of the existing West Devon kerbside recycling collection and the roll out a new kerbside recycling service that ensure that both Councils would meet the Devon Aligned Service, a service that all districts and the County Council had agreed would drive up recycling rates and reduce disposal costs.

Originally planned for late spring 2020 as a result of Covid delays, a new 2 phase plan was agreed which involved a realignment of the rounds in November 2020 and the commencement of the new service from March 2021.

Almost immediately problems emerged and after 6 weeks the roll-out was suspended and left the Council with 3 different collection methods for recycling.

Despite numerous meetings with FCC's senior management and the Council the disruption to residents was unsustainable. In December 2021, the Executive set-up a cross-party member Waste Working Group (WWG) to consider what options the Council had. The WWG commissioned external technical and legal advice through the course of the spring of 2022 and with performance degrading even further and the Council withholding deductions from the monthly invoices under the contract performance schedule instructed officers to take steps to terminate the contract. At this point officers instigated planning a service transfer and having concluded negotiations with FCC, agreed a mutual contract end date and the service transfer back to South Hams on 2nd October 2022.

Overseen by the WWG, in 14 weeks the Council:

- Secured the operator's licence and Environment Agency permits
- Created a new management team predominately from elsewhere within the officer team
- Agreed staff TUPE transfer and day to day contractor resources
- Agreed and transferred land leases and IT contracts, fuel and transport
- And successfully transferred the services.

Within 4 months the team had reduced the missed collection rate from an unsustainable 23,000 misses per 100,000 to 80 misses per 100,000 (the national performance benchmark).

Finally in November 2023 after procuring new vehicles and carrying out major infrastructure changes to the depot's the Council rolled out the remaining 24,000+ households to a full weekly kerbside recycling service. This change involved rerouting and rescheduling of almost all the waste and recycling collections. The roll-out has been seen as a significant success by members and residents, with one member describing it as "the best large scale change programme that the Council had ever completed."



South Hams

CASE STUDY

Bin-It 123 – Mid Devon District Council

Bin-It 123 was introduced in Mid Devon in October 2022 following an extensive trial carried out across urban and rural communities in 2021. Bin-It 123 stands for weekly food, fortnightly recycling, and three weekly residual (black bin) collections. Recent national statistics have placed Mid Devon District Council in the top 5% of all authorities for best recycling rates and reduced residual tonnage. This achievement has been recognised by OFLOG, who cited the district as one of the most improved recycling rates nationally, and the LGC, which shortlisted the service for the prestigious national Environment Service of the Year Award.

Key to this success has been tailored communication emphasising positive public outcomes arising from Bin-It 123, ranging from reducing the carbon footprint, generating additional income for the district that can be reinvested in public services, to keeping the community and countryside

tidy and litter free. These messages have been conveyed through a variety of media, including radio adverts and social media, which provided residents with a virtual tour of the waste depot and an overview of the recycling pathway. Parish, Town, and District representatives were also given in-person tours of the depot, leading to subsequent ward campaigns focused on increasing recycling rates.

The relationship between Education and Enforcement has been critical, both in offering practical advice to residents on increasing recycling and enabling robust enforcement action when warranted. Currently, Enforcement and Education teams collaborate to identify households and trouble spot areas in the district not complying with the Bin-It 123 scheme (e.g., not putting out recycling containers, leaving additional side waste for collection, using unauthorised bins). These efforts include providing in-person education and supplying extra containers and caddies when needed to boost recycling. Mid Devon is part of a national network that advises other authorities on designing and implementing three weekly collections and was recently invited to present on the effective use of education and enforcement to enhance recycling rates.



CASE STUDY

Recycling excellence

East Devon District Council (EDDC) is preparing for a significant operational shift as the Suez contract concludes in 2026. To ensure continued excellence in service delivery, EDDC is transitioning to a Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo). This move is designed to provide greater local control, flexibility, and opportunities for reinvestment directly back into community services.

The LATCo model allows EDDC to avoid substantial cost increases often driven by risk premiums in a limited market. By establishing a dedicated board and shareholder committee, the council will maintain strong oversight, ensuring alignment with EDDC's climate action goals and commitment to social value. Additionally, the LATCo is well-placed to explore innovative opportunities such as

regional circular economy initiatives and district heating networks, further supporting environmental sustainability.

Investing in a LATCo also benefits the local economy by retaining jobs within the district and creating the potential for commercial growth. The flexible structure enables the expansion of services and can serve as a platform for other partners to join, delivering cost-effective solutions across the Local Government Reorganization (LGR) landscape.

Feedback from staff has been overwhelmingly positive, with about 10% of the SUEZ workforce attending the first LATCo transition session. Andrew Hancock, Assistant Director – Street Scene, noted, “The LATCo offers EDDC the best balance of risk and control, and positions us to rise to future challenges.”

In summary, the LATCo transition is a strategic move that empowers EDDC to shape its future service provision, support local jobs and growth, and continue delivering value to the community while advancing environmental and social objectives.



West Devon

Criteria 4:

Working together to understand and meet local needs

We have undertaken an extensive and inclusive local engagement approach to inform proposals for local government reorganisation in Devon. Stakeholders across the county, including residents, councillors, MPs, and community groups, have contributed through surveys, forums, roadshows, and targeted meetings, ensuring that the recommended governance models are grounded in the lived experiences and diverse identities of Devon’s communities.

Key themes emerging from this engagement highlights the importance of preserving distinct local identities, maintaining accessible and responsive decision-making, and aligning governance structures with the county’s varied geographies and histories.

The feedback gathered has directly shaped our proposed reorganisation model, which seeks to balance efficiency, local empowerment, and the protection of Devon’s distinct character.

Criteria four focuses on the ability for an option to work collectively to understand and meet local needs. According to guidance provided by the government, there are three key areas that we address throughout this section:

Criteria 4a	Meaningful and constructive local engagement
Criteria 4b	Considering local identity and cultural and historic importance
Criteria 4c	Addressing local concerns

A local perspective

We have engaged with a broad range of stakeholders throughout the development of this proposal, ensuring that our recommended approach for reorganisation in Devon is responsive to the needs of our communities and residents. Feedback was collected by all individual councils in Devon, with eight of those councils sharing the insight to shape our 4-5-1 proposal. Public engagement surveys were distributed to residents across Devon through July and August 2025. The surveys included several questions related to LGR, place, key services and governance with a total of 5,948 responses received. Key themes from the surveys, included:

- Residents expressed a strong emotional and cultural connection to their local areas, emphasising the importance of preserving distinct community identities.
- There was widespread concern that larger, centralised councils would be disconnected from local needs and diminish local representation.
- Respondents overwhelmingly supported governance models that enable decisions to be made locally, with councillors and services accessible within their communities.
- There was a strong desire to maintain the rural and coastal character of towns and villages, with many expressing fears that being absorbed into larger authorities would lead to a loss of identity and neglect of local priorities.

The voices emerging from Devon's communities are rich with a sense of place and deeply rooted in locality. Residents consistently express a profound attachment to their local areas; places defined not just by geography, but by community, heritage, and a way of life that many fear could be lost through reorganisation.

From the rugged coastline of North Devon to the rolling hills of South Hams, people speak of their surroundings with reverence. One respondent from North Devon described

the coastline as "just magical," adding, "I'm always left open mouthed when I'm out and about. There are so many spectacular landscapes all around us." This connection to place is not just aesthetic, it is social and cultural. In Braunton, a resident highlighted the importance of "community spirit" and the role of the parish council in maintaining local responsiveness. In Down Thomas, South Hams, another wrote of the "peaceful rural setting, the sense of community, and the easy access to stunning countryside and coastal walks," underscoring the value of independence from "urban sprawl and overdevelopment." Torbay residents echoed this sentiment, with many describing the area as "a beautiful place to live," "peaceful," and "defined by its seaside character." Brixham residents emphasised the importance of protecting green spaces and resisting overdevelopment. Residents in Teignbridge echoed these sentiments, frequently citing "strong community spirit," "peaceful rural environment," and "excellent pre-school and primary school education" as defining features of their local identity. Many expressed pride in their towns and villages, with one respondent noting, "I feel happy and content in Dawlish. I'm proud to call it home."

This strong sense of locality is mirrored in concerns about governance. Many respondents fear that reorganisation could lead to a dilution of local representation and decision-making. A recurring theme is the desire for decisions to be made by those who understand the unique needs of rural communities. The fear of being governed by distant, urban-centric authorities, particularly Plymouth, runs deep. This sentiment is echoed in Torridge, where a respondent noted, "North Devon is a separate entity for obvious geographic reasons, it is not connected to the rest of the county, and as such has separate logistical needs."

Respondents frequently cite examples of poor infrastructure, inadequate public services, and a lack of affordable housing as evidence that rural needs are already underrepresented. In South Hams, one respondent wrote, "There's also a lack of affordable housing for local people, which pushes younger generations out of the area." Torbay residents repeatedly

raised issues around housing affordability, homelessness, and anti-social behaviour. Many called for better investment in town centres, improved public transport, and more support for young people and families.

The surveys also reveal a strong desire for local empowerment. Many respondents advocate for models of governance that preserve or enhance local control. "Local Government should be LOCAL not regional," one respondent from South Hams stated and "I think it right that we adopt the 4-5-1 model." Our model is seen by many respondents as a way to maintain regional relevance while avoiding over-centralisation.

Our model directly reflects the feedback from residents who want councils that are designed around their communities, responsive to local needs, and reflective of the unique geographies of Devon. The quantitative data supports this: in North Devon and Torridge, all respondents ranked "decisions that impact you will be made locally" and "council decisions are made in easy travelling distance from my area" as top priorities. In Torbay, these priorities were also dominant. Over 90% of respondents selected "decisions made locally" and "councillors who understand local issues" as top governance features. Many also highlighted the importance of retaining services within easy reach. Teignbridge respondents responded similarly, with many calling for "local representation" and "decisions made locally for the local community." Parish and town councils were frequently mentioned as vital to maintaining accountability and responsiveness.

Moreover, our 4-5-1 model offers a structure that can meet the diverse needs of Devon's communities. It preserves the intimacy and accountability of local governance while enabling strategic coordination where necessary. At the heart of these responses is a belief that local identity matters, that the character of a place is shaped by those who live there, and that governance should reflect this. Whether it's the "quirky nature" of a village in Mid Devon, the "rural ambience" of Tavistock, or the "historic landscape" of East Down, people want to see their communities protected, not homogenised into unitaries that do not reflect their place.

Engagement extended beyond residents, with further detail on local engagement below, who contributed perspectives on potential opportunities and challenges, reorganisation options, and the implications for the delivery of their core services. The insights gathered through this consultation process have directly influenced decision-making discussions among council Chief Executives and Leaders. Decision making has been supported by comprehensive analysis and informed by the lived experiences of local residents.

On the following pages we have outlined the engagement activity that has been undertaken at a local configuration level. Plymouth City Council and Exeter City Council are working independently pursuing different options to the 4-5-1 proposal which has involved 8 of the 11 councils in Devon in its submission. Torbay Council have helped with the development of this case and supported with knowledge of operating upper-tier services within Devon. However, they are pursuing their own option which leaves Torbay as their own unitary, due to the outcome of their resident survey, with 64% of respondents supporting retaining the current unitary structure. Exeter City Council favours a solution based on its unitary aspirations for the city, but modifying its existing administrative boundaries to try and demonstrate how it might be viable in scale by adding a significant number of rural parishes to the city footprint – an approach that has been highly-contested by residents of these rural parishes, who understandably don't wish to be governed by a small city authority and wish for their rural characteristics to be preserved in any reorganisation model. Plymouth's Interim Plan submission favours a growth option that would see thirteen parishes predominantly to the east of the city incorporated within an expanded administrative boundary for the City Council. This proposal is more extensive than the 4-5-1 + option and extends beyond the Plymouth Policy Area defined in the Joint Local Plan.



Local engagement in Teignbridge, Torbay, South Hams and West Devon

The reorganisation process has been underpinned by a robust and inclusive engagement strategy across South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon. This multi-council collaboration has ensured that stakeholders at every level, from senior leadership to residents, are actively involved and informed. Activity includes:

- Regular meetings such as the Devon District Forum, Devon Leaders & Chiefs, and Chief Executive Meetings have brought together Chief Executives and Leaders from all participating councils. These sessions have facilitated alignment on the 4-5-1 model, shared feedback from government, and coordinated responses to evolving policy landscapes. Councils also held joint sessions with MHCLG. Torbay has participated in MHCLG meetings and joint sessions with Devon and Plymouth Chief Executives, reinforcing its strategic involvement.
- Numerous All-Member Briefings, Executive/SLT Meetings, and Political Group Meetings

to ensure councillors are well-informed and able to contribute meaningfully. These sessions have covered the implications of the White Paper, the rationale behind the 4-5-1 proposal, and updates on government feedback. Teignbridge has also participated in Cabinet/Exec Meetings and Council Meetings, contributing to the broader political dialogue and decision-making process.

- South Hams, Teignbridge and West Devon have led targeted Town and Parish Council Briefings and Mayors & Clerks Meetings, in South Hams a particular focus being engagement with the 13 parishes within the Growth proposal that is being led independently by Plymouth. These sessions have been used to gather initial views, explain the alternative proposals, and demonstrate alignment with government criteria.
- Engagement with our MPs, Caroline Voaden, Rebecca Smith, Geoffrey Cox, Mel Stride and Martin Wrigley has been consistent across councils. These meetings have served to communicate local priorities, seek support, and influence national policy directions. Torbay has participated in MHCLG meetings and joint sessions with Devon and Plymouth Chief Executives, reinforcing its strategic involvement.



- A period of engagement with communities went live across the area on 17 June 2025, which was supported by newsletters, social media, and direct outreach, ensuring residents had multiple ways to access information and share their views. This launch marked the beginning of a comprehensive listening exercise, as a series of Engagement Roadshow Events (some of the events outlined below) were held across all councils, specifically designed to gather feedback and hear directly from communities:

- Teignbridge: Events including Tedburn St Mary, Moretonhampstead, Chudleigh, Exminster, and Newton Abbot.
- Torbay: Three roadshow events – one in each of Torbay's towns – plus discussions at other network meetings across Torbay.
- South Hams: Events including Shaugh Prior, Sparkwell, Cornwood, Ivybridge, Kingsbridge, Salcombe, Totnes, Dartmouth, and 12 further areas.
- West Devon: Events in Tavistock, Okehampton, Princetown, Lifton, Bridestowe, Chagford, Yelverton, and Hatherleigh.

Throughout these events, there was a consistent focus on listening to our residents, explaining why the 4-5-1 model is considered a strong fit for Devon, while openly acknowledging and inviting feedback on the development of alternative proposals.

The "4 Officers" project board and various workstreams (e.g., Stakeholder Engagement, Data, Legal & Governance) have played a central role in coordinating activity, gathering feedback from local engagement, sharing best practice, and ensuring consistency of messaging. Regular project board meetings, workshops, and internal briefings have supported a joined-up approach, with clear escalation routes for issues and a focus on continuous improvement.

The engagement across South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon reflects a unified, transparent, and inclusive approach to local government reform. Through strategic leadership forums, councillor briefings, town and parish outreach, MP engagement, and public consultation, the councils have built a strong foundation for collaborative decision-making and community-informed governance.



Local engagement in East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon and Torridge

East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge launched a coordinated public engagement survey on 20th June 2025, running through to 31st August 2025. This approach enabled the councils to gather valuable feedback from residents across the region. While East Devon utilised the Engagement HQ platform for their survey, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge, each used Engagement HQ.

East Devon District Council's primary engagement method was an online survey, providing a single, accessible point for residents to share their views. The survey was widely promoted via the council's website, social media channels, and outreach to community groups such as council tenants. Communication with town and parish clerks, council members, and staff helped broaden awareness. Two online briefing sessions have been held for Parish and Town Councillors and six in person events will be held in October/early November. There have also been regular newsletters, including the Community Engagement newsletter and weekly Residents' Update bulletin, alongside the Commonplace mailing list, which have further encouraged

participation. Regular briefing sessions have been held for staff, both online and in person, along with briefing sessions for the two MPs.

Mid Devon District Council also centred their engagement around an online survey, hosted on the Commonplace platform. The survey was promoted via the council website, social media, and outreach to community groups and council tenants. Information was shared through town and parish clerks, council members, and staff, supported by regular council publications. Staff briefings led by senior leadership, council meeting agenda items, and the Councillors' Update newsletter ensured the proposals were highlighted internally. Updates on LGR were given to the Mid Devon business forum to ensure the business community was aware of the survey and engagement opportunity. In addition to public scrutiny meetings in July and September, the Leader of Mid Devon also used his annual 'State of the District' debate in September to discuss LGR with town and parish representatives, to ensure hyper-local representation was recognised and embedded within the council's approach. The session heard from guest speakers from parish councils in Somerset – learning from their lived experience of LGR and the impact on them. This was attended by a range of town and parish councillors and clerks, as well as the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) to ensure that such learning



was of benefit not only for all local councils in Devon, but that our specific proposal for LGR embedded genuine community level engagement and intent from the outset.

North Devon's survey was promoted through social media and direct distribution via customer bulletins, the Equality Database, and outreach to groups such as VSCE, local housing providers, landlords, and representatives from XNP, Biosphere, NFU, DWP, and CAB. The survey was also available at the Town Centre Customer Hub and supported by a drop-in business event (jointly with Torridge) and the North Devon Show. A hybrid Parish Forum and individual parish outreach, including QR code leaflets, ensured broad parishioner participation. Engagement included briefings for Group Leaders, the Senior Management Team, all staff, Members, as well as initial engagement with the MP and Chief Executive of Exmoor National Park.

Torridge District Council complemented its widely circulated online survey by hosting several face-to-face events with Town & Parish councils in Holsworthy (23 July), Torrington (29 July), and Bideford (7 August). Individual meetings were also held with each of Town Councils (Bideford, Holsworthy, Northam and Torrington), which enabled the Leader and Chief Executive to meet face to face with each of the Mayors and Town Clerks to discuss

emerging proposals around the 4-5-1 model and hear about the concerns of each of the Town Councils. Additional outreach included a joint business drop-in event (7 August), Woolery Show (28 July), and Holsworthy Show (28 August). Alongside these public engagements, briefings were held for Members, Full Council, Group Leaders, Senior Leadership Team, staff, unions, and managers, supporting comprehensive internal communication.

Across the northern districts, the engagement process reflected a strategic and collaborative approach. Councils demonstrated cross-council collaboration, robust political group briefings, and strong internal coordination and governance. This collaborative effort ensured the feedback received was genuinely representative of local priorities, informing the ongoing dialogue around local government reorganisation.

Looking ahead, planning across the four and five unitary configurations includes further engagement sessions, staff briefings, and updates to ensure all stakeholders remain informed as the LGR process progresses towards final proposals and submissions. The process is one of ongoing dialogue, adaptability, and a shared commitment to delivering high quality services for residents.

Identity, culture and history

Devon is an expansive and remarkably varied county, defined by its varied landscapes that range from windswept moors and lush river valleys to dramatic cliffs and bustling seaside towns. This blend of rural landscapes, proud coastal heritage, and lively urban centres has fostered a vibrant sense of place for communities across the region. The county's distinctive geography, from the rolling hills of Mid Devon and the rugged granite of Dartmoor to the sweeping coastlines and golden sands of the north and south, has naturally shaped patterns of settlement and interaction, allowing each part of Devon to develop its own unique character and traditions. We will outline why it makes sense from an identity perspective to consolidate areas together below based on the specific and unique and complementary characteristics of each proposed unitary.

Our proposal recognises the unique identities of our place and reflects how people live their day to day lives. It also reflects a comprehensive Devon solution that works for all, balancing the urban, rural and coastal needs across our communities while also harnessing our economic growth potential by aligning our unitaries with our key economic assets. Respecting our environment, our model also shapes councils around our real communities and landscapes, with boundaries reflecting National Parks, providing a stronger platform to protect our natural environment while enabling sustainable growth.



Local identity in South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon

Geography, people and place

Stretching from the moorland heights of Dartmoor, embracing the vast majority of its unique landscape, to the picturesque coastline of South Devon, the districts of South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay, and West Devon encompass a remarkable diversity of environments and communities. This proposed arrangement recognises the fundamental importance of geography and local identity, reflecting the character of towns, villages, and coastal communities. It is rooted in what we have learned from our conversations with residents: above all, people want decisions about their services made close to home, by councillors who truly understand both urban and rural life.

Torbay's designation as a UNESCO Global Geopark is not only a marker of its geological significance but also a symbol of its commitment to sustainable tourism and environmental education—values echoed across South Devon's communities. Its sheltered bays, fossil-studded cliffs, and palm-lined promenades give it a distinctive coastal attraction. The coastline is inextricably linked to its neighbouring rural hinterlands. The villages and towns of South Hams, Teignbridge, and West Devon have grown not in isolation, but in conversation, through shared markets, educational pathways, and the steady flow of commuters, families, and visitors moving between moor, valley, and sea.

Shared economy and clean growth ambition

What unites these areas is not just landscape, but a vibrant and diverse economy. Agriculture, tourism, digital innovation, and marine industries all thrive here, each district lending unique strengths to the whole. Together, these communities share an ambition to lead the region's transition toward a low-carbon economy, aspiring to become a beacon for clean growth and environmental stewardship.

The South Devon National Landscape, with its rolling hills and rich biodiversity, serves as a focal point for climate action, supported by local plans for a greener, more resilient future.

Local plans across South Hams, Teignbridge, and Torbay prioritise net-zero development, green infrastructure, and nature-based solutions, positioning the new authority to lead on climate resilience and sustainable prosperity. For example:

- The **Teignbridge Local Plan 2013–2033** outlines a clear strategy for low-carbon development and green infrastructure investment.
- The **Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (2019)** commits to sustainable growth, biodiversity protection, and climate adaptation.
- The **Torbay Economic Growth Strategy 2022–2030** sets out ambitions for net zero, green jobs, and community-led climate action.

Services and partnerships – simplified and aligned

Our 4-5-1 proposal simplifies access to services for residents of South Hams, Teignbridge, and West Devon, who would now only need to engage with one council for their needs. This integration is designed for a seamless customer experience and brings together the best practices from all four councils. Building on Torbay's pioneering model of integrated health and adult social care, highlighted in the **Torbay Story** and **Torbay Council's Community and Corporate Plan**, the new authority would extend this joined-up approach across the region, leveraging digital innovation and community partnerships to deliver more responsive, person-centred services.

Collaboration with key partners including colleges, the police, NHS, and national parks would be more efficient, as partners would connect with a single authority rather than multiple organisations, reducing duplication and increasing responsiveness.



Population and partnership scale

With a combined population exceeding 400,000, the new unitary authority would be large enough to deliver efficiencies and strategic impact yet remain small enough to be agile and responsive to community needs. Importantly, this scale would enable better alignment to health boundaries, building on the successful Torbay model, where integrated health and adult social care services have already delivered tangible benefits for the local population.

Local collaboration and community voice

The unity of purpose among these districts is derived through active engagement including regular in-person meetings with town and parish councils, robust local turnouts, and strategic forums that cement a culture of transparency and participatory governance. These mechanisms ensure that decisions are guided by the voice of the community and the perspectives of those who understand local challenges and opportunities best.

Why unitarisation of these areas makes sense

A unitary arrangement for South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay, and West Devon is both logical and visionary. Local economies are interconnected, environmental challenges cross administrative boundaries, and cultural identities and ambitions reinforce one another. Unitarisation aligns governance with the lived geography of South Devon, where economic clusters, travel patterns, and environmental priorities transcend administrative boundaries. It provides the platform to:

- **Align governance with geography and identity:** New boundaries would reflect real patterns of settlement, travel, and interaction, respecting the character of moors, coast, villages, and towns.
- **Strengthen community voice:** A balanced mix of councillors ensures that rural, urban, and coastal interests are represented, and policies are deeply grounded in the lived experience of residents.
- **Enhance access to services:** Residents will benefit from a simplified, single point of contact, improving efficiency and customer experience.
- **Improve collaboration with partners:** Colleges, the police, NHS, and national parks would engage with fewer councils, facilitating joined-up solutions and more responsive service delivery.
- **Drive clean growth and economic ambition:** Aligning with key economic assets such as tourism, marine industries, and higher education (including the Naval College), the new unitary authority can unlock investment, innovation, and sustainable prosperity at scale.
- **Enable integrated health and care:** Building on Torbay's success, the new authority would align with health boundaries to deliver joined-up health and social care services for all its communities.

Local identity in East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon and Torridge

Unity of purpose and community engagement

The unity of purpose among East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge is rooted in meaningful, ongoing conversations with the people who live, work, and shape these diverse geographies. This region encompasses the expansive wilds of Exmoor National Park in the north, the dramatic coastline of North Devon and Torridge, the UNESCO-listed Jurassic Coast in East Devon, and the patchwork of rolling farmland, historic market towns, and villages that characterise Mid Devon. Exeter, by contrast, stands as the vibrant county town, a hub of civic life, higher education, and enterprise, where the Lord Mayor, and world-class institutions like the University of Exeter and The Met Office cement its status as both a regional capital and a community of neighbourhoods.

Across these varied landscapes, parish and town councils, coastal and rural communities, and urban residents come together through regular forums, town hall meetings, and outreach events. North Devon and Torridge demonstrate resilience and adaptability: small businesses, tourism operators, and agricultural organisations collaborate to overcome the challenges of rurality, seasonal economies, and changing demographics. The coastal strip, with its surfing beaches and working harbours, sits in contrast and complement to the upland farms and villages of Exmoor and Mid Devon, where community halls, local markets, and voluntary groups provide vital social and economic glue. North Devon's residents strongly identify with their region, a sentiment reinforced by its distinctive geography and international recognition as the UK's only World Surf Reserve.

The **North Devon and Torridge Local Plan** was developed through wide-ranging consultation, including with parish councils, local businesses, and voluntary organisations, to balance growth

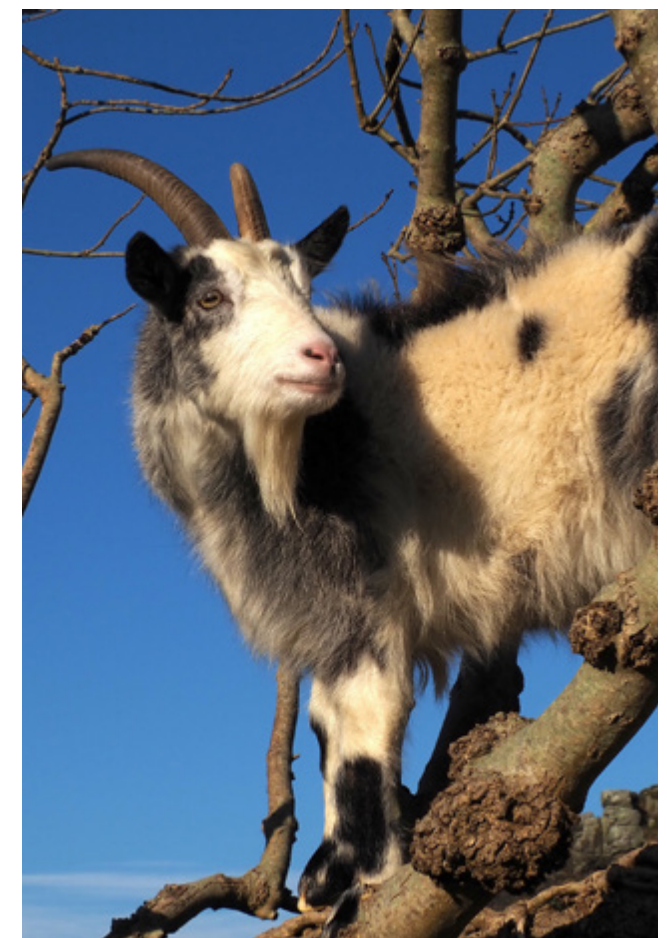
with the protection of the area's world-class environment and community identity. The plan's vision is for northern Devon to remain "a highly desirable place where people are able to live well, work productively, move freely, benefit from excellent education, health and leisure facilities and live in harmony with nature and our world-class environment".

Cultural engagement is a key feature, with strategies such as the **Northern Devon Culture Strategy** (North Devon have placed culture at the heart of regeneration plans through the Barnstaple Vision) and **East Devon's Cultural Strategy 2022–2031** highlighting the importance of local festivals, creative industries, and community-led arts initiatives in fostering social cohesion, wellbeing, and economic opportunity. In East Devon, over 98% of survey respondents agreed that a strong cultural offer is important, and the district supports more than 100 public venues for culture, including museums, theatres, libraries, and heritage sites.

Exeter, meanwhile, is a place of accelerated delivery, leading the way in efficient new urban housing, sustainable transport, and the creation of new communities. Its traditions and innovation are visible in the city's approach to growth: blending heritage, green space, and ambitious plans for inclusive prosperity. The Exeter Local Plan emphasises the city's commitment to sustainable development, with specific goals to increase housing supply, improve public transport infrastructure, and enhance green spaces. Key projects include the development of the South West Exeter urban extension, which will provide new homes, schools, and community facilities, and the enhancement of the city's cycling and walking networks to promote active travel. These initiatives are designed to support Exeter's vision of becoming a leading sustainable city, balancing economic growth with environmental stewardship and community well-being.

Why Unitarisation of These Areas Makes Sense

A unitary authority for East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge would build on existing collaboration and shared



priorities, as articulated in the [Thriving in Northern Devon Partnership Strategy](#) and local economic strategies. These areas are already working together on key issues such as health, climate, housing, skills, and economic development, with a shared vision that “everyone in Northern Devon has the same opportunity to live a healthy, sustainable and fulfilling life”. This approach would recognise Exeter’s place as a small city with big influence – directly linking the growth areas to the rural East and North with better infrastructure planning and delivery to accelerate sustainable growth. It recognises the road and rail links traversing this shared geography, and it demonstrates alignment with government criteria for scale and efficiency, while ensuring that the separate place and character distinctiveness of southern Devon and Plymouth each have their own authority in a model that works for the whole of Devon. Unitarisation of these areas can:

- **Reflect geography and community:** The landscape here is varied and spectacular—Exmoor’s moorland, the surf beaches of Croyde and Woolacombe in North Devon, the dramatic estuaries and working harbours of Torridge, the cliffs, bays and beaches of the Jurassic Coast, and the fertile valleys of Mid Devon. Each geography shapes how communities live, interact, and trade. From red ruby cattle in the north, to the red soils of mid Devon, or the red cliffs of the Jurassic coast, perhaps it is serendipitous that Devon Red cider is grown, pressed and matured by one of the area’s many successful businesses right in the heart of this proposed new authority. Unitarisation is an opportunity that will allow local authority governance to better reflect these lived patterns, connecting coastal, urban, and rural voices in a single, locally attuned authority.
- **Strengthen community voice:** With such a diversity of places—fishing villages, market towns, rural hamlets, and the civic energy of Exeter—strong engagement mechanisms are already in place. Parish meetings, coastal forums, and business networks ensure that local perspectives guide decision-making, grounding policy in local identity, culture, and ambition.

- **Champion environmental stewardship:** The new authority would be positioned to safeguard world-renowned assets: the biosphere of North Devon, the landscapes and coastal environments of Torridge, the wilds of Exmoor, and the protected cliffs of the Jurassic Coast. Coordinated action on climate, flood resilience, biodiversity, and sustainable tourism could be delivered at a scale that reflects the interconnected nature of these environments, using data and evidence from world-leading climate scientists hosted at the Met Office, one of our major employers with truly global reach. Investment in green infrastructure, decarbonisation, and nature recovery would support both economy and ecology.
- **Unlock economic and educational potential:** North Devon and Torridge’s thriving small business community, East Devon’s visitor economy, and the agricultural strengths of Mid Devon would all benefit from streamlined support, investment, and promotion. Tourism is a major economic driver, with East Devon alone attracting 6.7 million visitors a year and generating over £350 million for the local economy. Exeter’s status as a university city and innovation centre creates opportunities for the entire region—linking higher education, research, and skills with the needs of rural and coastal communities. The capacity for accelerated delivery around housing and new towns means that sustainable growth can be achieved without sacrificing local character. The area is also united by various highly specialised and advanced manufacturers, often exporting globally on their reputation for quality, precision and technical ability. From parachutes used by NASA to successfully land probes on Mars (Heathcoat Fabrics), to high-performance filtration systems for Formula One racing teams (Pall Corporation), this new authority has the potential to work far more productively with the skills and education sectors to build the skillsets needed to enable continued development and expansion of these innovative businesses in the advanced manufacturing sector. The capacity for accelerated delivery around housing and new towns means that sustainable growth can be achieved without sacrificing local character.



Local identity in Plymouth

Place, community and purpose

Across the vibrant heart of Devon’s southwestern coast, Plymouth stands as a city defined by its maritime economy, resilient communities, and a history inextricably linked to the sea. Here, neighbourhood forums, city partnerships, and outreach initiatives bring together residents from Stonehouse to Plymstock—each community linked by the city’s unique geography and shared sense of belonging.

Plymouth is home to innovative small businesses, a world-renowned university, and a thriving marine sector collaborate to navigate the challenges of urban regeneration, economic transition, and social diversity. Its waterfront, an ever-changing horizon of harbours, marinas, and Devonport dockyard, contrasts and complements the city’s suburbs and bustling commercial core.

This adaptability is underpinned by strategic planning priorities set out in the [Plymouth’s Local Plan](#), which identifies Plymouth as a “transformational city” with a focus on inclusive growth, sustainable neighbourhoods, and innovation-led regeneration.

In Plymouth, engagement is shaped by a deep attachment to place. The balance of environmental stewardship and economic opportunity is a daily reality, as residents work collectively to protect green spaces, revitalise historic sites, and invest in enterprising futures.

The city’s commitment to protecting its natural assets is reflected in the Local Plan’s emphasis on green infrastructure networks, nature recovery, and climate resilience, ensuring that environmental priorities are embedded in every aspect of urban development. Plymouth’s identity as the “City by the Sea” has become a strong and distinctive brand, capturing its maritime heritage and forward-looking outlook while uniting communities around a shared sense of pride and purpose.

The Case for Plymouth as a Standalone Unitary Authority

The continuation of a standalone unitary authority for Plymouth makes sense and recognises the city's unique needs, opportunities, and identity. Plymouth's natural boundaries and urban lifelines, the rivers Plym and Tamar, the industrial core of dockyards and ports, and the networks of education, health, and transport bind the city's distinct neighbourhoods into a cohesive whole. This status as a unified authority enables Plymouth to:

- **Reflect urban geography and community:** Plymouth's landscape is dynamic and distinctive. Standalone status allows governance to reflect these lived patterns, connecting the city's diverse voices and ensuring that local priorities are not diluted by broader rural or coastal considerations.
- **Strengthen local voice and civic leadership:** With a rich variety of communities, Plymouth has developed robust mechanisms for engagement. Neighbourhood planning forums, youth parliaments, and business alliances ensure that policy is informed by local experience, ambition, and identity. A dedicated city authority maintains this direct relationship, ensuring decisions are grounded in Plymouth's own narrative. This is reinforced by the Local Plan's commitment to community-led planning and neighbourhood empowerment, particularly through the delivery of "Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities".
- **Champion environmental stewardship and renewal:** As Britain's Ocean City, Plymouth is uniquely positioned to lead in marine innovation, coastal management, and climate resilience. Its world-class waterfront, green spaces, and commitment to sustainability are protected and enhanced by a single authority able to coordinate action across blue and green infrastructure, nature recovery, and low-carbon investment, supporting both environmental and economic renewal. The Local Plan supports this ambition through strategic policies on waterfront

regeneration, low-carbon development, and the protection of biodiversity and coastal habitats.

- **Unlock economic, educational, and cultural potential:** Plymouth's thriving university sector, advanced manufacturing, and creative industries all benefit from focused investment and promotion. Its port, international ferry links, and naval base create distinctive opportunities for trade, research, and skills development. Standalone governance connects these assets, accelerating regeneration, supporting inclusive growth, and celebrating the city's cultural vibrancy from theatre to street art, festivals to gastronomy. The Local Plan identifies key growth areas such as the City Centre and Waterfront Growth Area and supports cultural investment through policies promoting creative industries and public realm improvements.
- **Promote local identity:** Plymouth's story is its own, shaped by seafarers, shipbuilders, innovators, and artists. Its place in the national imagination, from the Mayflower departure to its role in modern defence and science, is unique. As a standalone unitary authority, Plymouth can amplify this identity, ensuring that governance, investment, and opportunity are as ambitious and resilient as the city itself. This identity is celebrated and protected through the Local Plan's heritage policies, which support the conservation of historic assets and the integration of cultural heritage into future development.



Plymouth



Torridge

Criteria 5:

Supporting devolution arrangements

The Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (DTCCA) aims to align strategic priorities, such as housing, transport, skills, and economic development, with local needs, particularly benefiting rural and coastal communities. It currently operates under a democratic leadership structure, ensuring transparency and engagement with local partners.

The section also introduces the future proposed MSA for Devon in the context of our 4-5-1 model, which proposes a three-unitary configuration to maintain strong local identities, enhance service delivery, and provide a foundation for future devolution arrangements. Our approach is designed to deliver efficient, locally tailored governance while supporting unified strategic leadership across the region.

Criteria five focuses on the ability for an option to support the devolution agenda for Devon. According to guidance provided by the government, there are three key areas that we address throughout this section:

Criteria 5a	The existing County Combine Authority and the route to a Mayoral Strategic Authority
Criteria 5b	Unlocking devolution
Criteria 5c	Equal representation under a Combined Authority

Our vision for Devon is to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) that delivers balanced, effective governance across the region. This vision is rooted in our commitment to local empowerment, strategic coordination, and inclusive growth. All eleven councils in Devon have recently written to government indicating support for advancing toward a full Mayoral Strategic Authority. The MSA will be built on four equal pillars: the three proposed authorities under our 4-5-1 model— Southern Devon, Northern Devon, and Plymouth— and Cornwall. These pillars ensure that strategic decisions reflect the diverse needs of our communities and that no single area dominates the regional agenda.

We have already taken significant steps toward this vision. The Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (DTCCA) was established in early 2025, following the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. This authority has begun aligning strategic priorities with local needs, particularly in rural and coastal communities. It operates under a democratic leadership structure, with oversight and scrutiny mechanisms in place to ensure transparency and accountability.

Our 4-5-1 model proposed in this document provides the optimal foundation for the MSA. It creates three balanced unitary authorities that preserve local identities, enhance service delivery, and support unified strategic leadership. This configuration ensures fair representation and avoids the risks of over-centralisation, enabling each authority to contribute effectively to regional decision-making.

Our approach is underpinned by a philosophy of working across boundaries to address the realities of issues that exist on those boundaries. Whether it is housing, transport, skills, or environmental sustainability, the challenges we face do not stop at administrative lines. Our model embraces this reality, fostering collaboration and shared responsibility to deliver better outcomes for all our communities.

The establishment of the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority

The devolution journey for Devon began with local authorities pursuing greater local control over economic development, housing, transport and skills, resulting in a signed devolution deal with central government and the making of the Devon and Torbay County Combined Authority (DTCCA) Regulations 2025 under powers from the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. The Regulations brought the DTCCA into being early in 2025.

The primary purpose of the DTCCA is to put decision-making over strategic priorities closer to local people and partners, so that areas such as housing, employment, education and skills, transport, net-zero transition, and local economic growth can be aligned to local needs and opportunities rather than being determined solely by central government. The case for change and priorities focus on closing productivity gaps, improving living standards, accelerating green skills and housing delivery, particularly in rural and coastal communities, by aggregating strategic powers and funding at a county scale.

The DTCCA is a Foundation Strategic Authority under the English devolution framework with delegated powers and budgets from central government to make local decisions on matters agreed in the devolution deal. Key functional areas include local transport planning and delivery (including a Local Transport Plan); housing interventions and working with Homes England to unblock affordable housing delivery; skills and employment programmes targeted at green and local labour markets; and funding control to accelerate low-carbon business transitions and targeted capital projects. The DTCCA therefore combines strategic planning, funding allocation, programme commissioning and partnership coordination powers across these sectors to deliver integrated local outcomes.

The DTCCA operates with a democratic leadership drawn from the constituent councils, governed by a constitution and supported by statutory officers to ensure financial and legal compliance. It includes an overview and scrutiny function and an audit committee to provide transparency and accountability for its decisions and use of devolved funds. The CCA is also framed to work closely with district and parish partners, the Devon Association of Local Councils and local stakeholders to ensure place-based decision-making and to maximise the benefits of transferred powers for communities across Devon and Torbay.

The DTCCA will have direct control of adult education with the ability to create new training and retraining opportunities. Through Local Skills Improvement Plans, the CCA will work with business and education leaders to create a stronger, joined up relationship between employers and schools, colleges and universities to provide the skilled workforce our local economy needs for the future.

The Get Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Working Plan was approved in September 2025. The plan represents collaborative working across the region and responds to long-standing challenges by developing a Youth Offer,

launching Connect to Work, creating a Job Quality Charter and co-designing place-based interventions. Pilots will initially be rolled out in Torbay, Ilfracombe and Newton Abbot before being implemented across the region. It sets out priorities that include helping people with health problems get back into work, supporting young people to find long-term jobs, making jobs better and helping people earn enough money, helping unpaid carers return to work, fixing staff shortages and helping people learn the right skills and making sure all areas across Devon get fair chances.

In relation to housing, the DTCCA will implement investment in affordable housing schemes intended for local residents and aims to address homelessness. Community Land Trust-led initiatives will facilitate the development of affordable housing in rural and coastal areas. In September 2025, the DTCCA introduced the Devon Housing Investment Prospectus, which outlines various types of housing developments throughout the region. The approach is based on collaboration with Homes England and utilises the Affordable Housing Programme and the Brownfield Infrastructure and Land Fund to establish a coordinated investment pipeline for affordable housing projects serving local communities.



Unlocking devolution through the 4-5-1

We are confident that our 4-5-1 model presents an effective path forward for our residents, communities, and region. Our model also provides a foundation to realise the full benefits of devolution. All eleven councils in Devon have recently written to government indicating support for advancing toward a full Mayoral Strategic Authority, initially encompassing Devon and Torbay, with a long-term goal of incorporating Cornwall into the Peninsula. Our proposal, centred around the 4-5-1 three-unitary configuration, is appropriately scaled to achieve efficiencies while enhancing public service delivery and maintaining strong connections to our distinct localities.

Our residents have told us they do not want to be absorbed into unitaries where the sense of place is lost, which is why our 4-5-1 model has been designed with a sense of place at the forefront. Our proposals allow for greater resident and community voice, with councils better equipped and empowered to address challenges unique to their place which would be potentially overlooked as part of a unitary covering a much larger footprint.

Furthermore, our approach more effectively aligns with residents' expectations for local accountability, customised service provision, efficient governance, and substantive engagement within a devolved structure, than some of the alternatives suggesting a single council representing most of Devon. It simultaneously facilitates unified strategic leadership across Devon's varied economic regions, with the balanced board of democratic representation that could successfully underpin a fully devoted Mayoral Authority in due course. Conversely, consolidating into fewer, larger councils would not provide the same support, nor would it address the specific devolution opportunities for economic development with equivalent precision. More detail on how our 4-5-1 proposal will enable devolution in Devon have been included below.

Our 4-5-1 model fundamentally enables and supports devolution in Devon by delivering an equitable and effective governance structure that reflects the region's diverse communities and geographies. By creating three authorities of broadly comparable size and representation, ensuring that no single area dominates decision-making and that all voices are heard fairly. This balanced structure generates genuine partnership and collaborative leadership, fostering trust and shared ambition across the county, Torbay, Plymouth and, in future, potentially Cornwall.

Importantly, our 4-5-1 model empowers the future MSA to make strategic decisions with a clear mandate from an inclusive and representative board. By removing the two-tier local government voting system, where district representatives previously had limited input, this approach brings housing, economic development, and planning powers into a single, unified framework. In turn, this enables more holistic, place-based solutions that are responsive to the specific needs and opportunities of each locality, from urban centres to rural and coastal communities. The establishment of the DTCCA demonstrates how strategic coordination across multiple councils can unlock housing projects for care-leavers and community regeneration by utilising skills, experience and capacity at the scale of local intervention. By creating councils more effectively shaped by their place, our model will help accelerate social mobility within the wider Devon area, creating better life chances for our residents and reducing future demand on services. It is not just a governance structure but a delivery platform that channels devolved funding into targeted local outcomes.

Moreover, our model supports local accountability and transparency, as each council remains directly connected to its residents and is equipped to advocate for their interests at the combined authority level. This structure encourages strong local leadership, promotes innovation in service delivery, and enhances the ability to secure and deploy devolved funding efficiently. By aligning governance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, our 4-5-1 model lays the groundwork for a successful, sustainable, and community-driven devolution arrangement for Devon.



Our 4-5-1 model, by enabling devolution at scale, creates an environment that is primed to drive sustainable economic growth across Devon. Through the establishment of the new Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA), local leaders will have the flexibility and authority to tailor economic strategies to the distinct strengths and opportunities of their areas, whether that be supporting innovative rural enterprises, nurturing coastal tourism, or accelerating the growth of advanced industries in urban centres. Crucially, the introduction of a statutory Spatial Development Strategy will provide the strategic planning framework necessary to address the significant housing delivery challenges facing the region. Given the complex geography of Devon, with extensive areas designated as National Parks, National Landscapes, and sites constrained by topography, flood risk, and biodiversity considerations, it is clear that a blanket approach to growth is neither feasible nor desirable. Instead, a robust, place-based Spatial Development Strategy will allow the MSA to coordinate housing delivery in a way that respects these constraints while ensuring that growth is focused where it is most appropriate, particularly in and around Plymouth, Teignbridge, Exeter, East Devon and

South Hams, where the demand and capacity for new homes are greatest.

The MSA, empowered with enhanced data capabilities and a county-wide perspective, will be able to develop a much clearer understanding of where housing is most needed and where delivery is falling short. This data-driven approach will underpin a strategic plan that not only meets diverse local needs but also overcomes historic delivery barriers. With greater control over funding, skills development, infrastructure investment and business support, the MSA is better positioned to respond swiftly to local economic challenges and to capitalise on emerging sectors. The Hotels to Homes initiative in Torbay shows how a unitary authority can repurpose underused assets to meet acute housing needs, using devolved capital to deliver EPC-rated, low-carbon homes. This kind of place-based intervention is only possible when councils have the autonomy and scale to act decisively, as provided through our 4-5-1 model. Similarly, our model ensures that growth is inclusive and place-based, unlocking the full economic potential of each community and delivering tangible benefits for residents and businesses alike.

Our future ambition for devolution

Our 4-5-1 model is the cornerstone of our vision for devolved governance. Our approach is designed to balance efficiency and local representation by bringing together three authorities of comparable size and influence, prioritising the sense of place and empowering councils to address the unique needs of their communities. The following pages outline the future ambition for devolution in Devon and how our 4-5-1 approach can unlock the full potential of devolution for the region.

The DTCCA, announced in 2024 under a Level 2 devolution deal, provided a significant platform for local leaders to begin shaping place-based solutions to transport, housing, skills, and innovation challenges. However, the powers and funding available to the DTCCA have remained more modest compared to those offered under Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) arrangements.



Under the current DTCCA model, transport powers have included responsibility for a new area-wide Local Transport Plan, Bus Service Improvement Plans, concessionary fares, and the potential to seek bus franchising powers. While these represent important steps, the deal did not consolidate transport funding, with local highways funding continuing to flow directly to councils. Rail powers were not devolved, and DTCCA's role has been largely one of partnership with Network Rail and the Peninsula Strategic Transport Body, rather than direct control. The CCA has focused on strategic coordination and partnership working, but has not had access to the long-term, integrated transport settlements available to MSAs.

The move to an MSA would mark a step change in both powers and resources. MSAs receive long-term, consolidated transport funding through Integrated Settlements, including the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS) from 2027/28. Mayors can manage a Key Route Network with Power of Direction, influence local road standards, and shape integrated ticketing systems. They also hold a statutory role in rail governance, with the ability to request rail devolution and take control of stations. Comparator regions have seen City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) allocations of £74m and Integrated Transport Block allocations of £40m per year, enabling strategic investment and planning on a scale not currently possible under the DTCCA.

In terms of investment, the DTCCA has benefited from £16 million in capital funding to support housing, net zero, and green skills, as well as capacity funding and alignment with UK Shared Prosperity Fund delivery. However, MSAs receive multi-year, formula-based Integrated Settlements, consolidating major funding lines and retaining 30-year investment funds. They also gain access to broader fiscal powers, including the reform of the Mayoral precept, with comparator places receiving investment fund allocations of £31.5m per annum.

Skills and education powers under the DTCCA include full devolution of the Adult Education Budget and Free Courses for Jobs from 2026/27, with the authority able to shape provider allocations, set outcomes, and

support Skills Bootcamps. The DTCCA also contributes to Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP) and careers strategy, with continued Careers Hub activity following LEP integration. MSAs, however, control a single, un-ringfenced adult skills pot and have joint ownership of LSIPs, including designation of Employer Representative Bodies, sector priorities, and approval rights. Mayors also help shape future employment support beyond Jobcentre Plus, co-designing and potentially delivering services such as National Careers Service pilots and non-Jobcentre Plus employment services, with many MSAs piloting approaches to blend employment, skills, and health services.

Housing powers under the DTCCA include land assembly and compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers (with local consent), and the opportunity to pilot a Green Homes small sites programme. The Government has committed to working jointly with DTCCA to improve housing delivery, affordability, and regeneration, and to explore solutions on homelessness, second homes, and short-term lets. MSAs, in contrast, have statutory powers to lead on Spatial Development Strategies, development management powers to intervene in planning applications of strategic importance, and the ability to establish Mayoral Development Corporations and Development Orders. Mayors can introduce a Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and are supported to establish public land commissions, with comparator regions receiving Brownfield Housing Fund allocations of £14.5m per annum.

Innovation is another area where the DTCCA has made progress, with commitments from UK Research & Innovation (UKRI) and the Department for Science and Innovation (DSIT) to collaborate on sector strengths, and a portion of capital funding allocated to coastal and marine energy infrastructure. MSAs, however, co-develop long-term local innovation strategies with UKRI and Innovate UK, participate in new regional innovation funding programmes, and have annual engagement with the Science Minister, access to regional investment data, and a formal role as consultees on DSIT and UKRI strategy.

The transition from the DTCCA to an MSA in Devon would unlock a series of formalised and strengthened partnerships with Government and arms-length agencies, alongside additional legal powers, funding streams, and financial flexibilities. The MSA model offers longer-term funding settlements, particularly for transport, which enable strategic planning and investment aligned with housing and employment growth. Crucially, this enhanced framework allows for greater alignment with Plymouth, ensuring that the city's significant economic, transport and housing opportunities are integrated into county-wide strategies, maximising its role as a regional growth engine. This move would build on the foundations laid by the DTCCA, positioning Devon to deliver more ambitious outcomes for its communities and to play a leading role in the next phase of English devolution.

While the section outlines the benefits of devolution and the move towards an MSA, it is our 4-5-1 model that enables these benefits to be realised effectively, creating the simpler structures envisaged by the English Devolution White Paper, while ensuring these new councils are suitable expressions of our places and empowered to own the necessary trajectories of growth, regional inequality and better health outcomes. Our model provides a governance structure that is balanced, locally responsive, and strategically coherent, ensuring that devolved powers are exercised in ways that reflect the distinct needs of Devon's communities. By aligning unitary authorities with functional geographies and economic clusters, our 4-5-1 model supports targeted investment, integrated service delivery, and inclusive growth. It avoids the risks of over-centralisation and ensures that each authority has the capacity and mandate to lead within a devolved framework. Our model embeds local decision-making into the governance structure, allowing decisions to be made as close to communities as possible. Through mechanisms such as Local Community Networks and Neighbourhood Area Committees, our 4-5-1 model ensures that devolved powers are not only held but exercised in ways that are responsive, inclusive, and grounded in place.

Population ratios of a future MSA under our 4-5-1 model

Balance has been a key principle of decision making for councils as part of our joint process. Options considered initially as part of our rigorous appraisal process were subsequently discounted due to having significant imbalance in population splits (amongst many other metrics explained previously). Under our 4-5-1 model, we will ensure our constituent unitary councils are established on the basis of effective and fair representation, decision making and voice under the future MSA. Our three unitary authorities have population figures ranging between 268,736 and 546,738, with a percentage split of 34% (4), 44% (5) and 22% (1). The balance provided under our 4-5-1 model (sensible number of unitaries under the future MSA, avoiding an excessive population ratio between the largest and smallest authorities) ensures that no future unitary authority carries a disproportionate population, which is a key risk under other proposals whereby an excessively large portion of the county is aggregated into one mega-unitary.

Outlined below are the population figures for the proposed unitaries in our 4-5-1 model. The potential inclusion of Cornwall in the future MSA has also been taken into account, with the table illustrating that considerations regarding balance and effective representation remain consistent. While we acknowledge that incorporating Cornwall is beyond the current scope of this exercise, our leadership remains committed to an inclusive approach and is

Metric	Southern	Northern	Plymouth	Cornwall
Population	426,155	546,738	268,736	570,300
Population %	24%	30%	15%	31%
Population 2040	471,674	627,074	279,652	618,000
Population 2040 %	24%	31%	14%	31%

Figure: Population ratios in the 4-5-1 model with the inclusion of Cornwall as part of the future MSA

open to Cornwall Council joining the authority in the future. The region’s collective strengths, including environmental resources, research capabilities, tourism, advanced manufacturing, and clean energy, are some of the combined region’s strengths.

The key priorities for the proposed South West Peninsula MSA include:

- Maximising the region’s environmental and marine innovation potential.
- Creating an integrated transport network connecting rural, coastal and urban communities.
- Developing coordinated skills provision for key growth sectors.
- Addressing housing affordability and availability.
- Supporting national defence infrastructure at Devonport dockyard.

The balanced population ratios under our 4-5-1 model are not just a technical strength, they are fundamental to enabling effective devolution. By ensuring that no single authority dominates in size or influence (a key risk of proposals advocating for unitaries covering disproportionate size and populations), our model promotes fair representation and collaborative decision-making within a future MSA. This balance supports equitable resource distribution, strengthens democratic legitimacy, and ensures that strategic priorities reflect the needs of all communities across Devon and Torbay. It also mitigates the risk of disproportionate voice or skewed investment, which could arise under alternative configurations.

CASE STUDY

DTCCA

Devon has a long history of working to secure devolution and accelerate delivery on key outcomes. The DTCCA was formally established in March 2025 and includes Torbay alongside the 8 Districts and County Council covering the two-tier area of Devon. Plymouth has been formally invited to join and has been allocated a non-constituent member seat on the board, although they have not yet sought to take this up.

Work to establish the DTCCA ran in parallel with the Devon Housing Commission, led by Lord Best. This was a piece of work initiated by the Devon Housing Task Force on behalf of all 10 councils that went on to form the DTCCA and was supported by the University of Exeter. This year-long commission explored the various housing challenges across the Devon system and made a number of recommendations to local authorities, to government, and to the emerging DTCCA. Since that time, the CCA has taken on board the learning from that commission and has deployed a substantial chunk of its initial capital allocation to projects that unlock housing projects for community, care-leaver, or social value propositions. The ambition and intent encapsulated in the Devon Housing Task Force has moved from being an informal partnership across the 10 councils, to being a formal part of the DTCCA governance and advisory board structure, with a full-time permanent officer resource supporting the new DTCCA Housing Advisory Group. Work continues on various themes to address Devon’s housing challenges, with one major aspect being the development of a shared delivery pipeline being co-produced with Homes England. This will help unlock barriers to housing delivery and provide a shared investment pipeline to give greater confidence to industry and accelerate

build out across the area. We have a strong record of supporting devolution, enabling strategic conversations to seek co-delivery of shared local and national priorities, and to seek opportunities to progress further and faster.

In July 2025, Leaders of all 11 councils in Devon wrote to the Government, outlining their appetite for progress towards a full Mayoral Strategic Authority. This would ideally include Cornwall as part of a wider Peninsula Mayoralty but, in the interim, could be established across the whole of Devon, Plymouth and Torbay to provide full devolution to over 1.2m residents. Our proposal provides a clear balance across the 3 new authorities, with each council being an appropriate size to enable balanced representation on the combined authority board. It would improve the situation considerably from today’s arrangement, where equal voting rights are afforded to council areas covering 825k residents and those representing 140k. It would also vastly improve the democratic inclusivity of these devolved structures by incorporating all housing, strategic planning and economic development functions within the board makeup, rather than having to accommodate a two-tier voting arrangement where district representatives only have limited voting rights.

As such, our proposal builds on the Devon devolution journey so far, strengthens it for the future, and builds in opportunity to ensure a stronger voice for Plymouth with its vital defence sector and long-term deals in place necessary to reinforce skills and supply chains locally in the support of the nation’s defences, alongside wider local and national ambition.



Honiton, East Devon

Criteria 6:

Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

Our proposal places community voice and neighbourhood empowerment at the centre of Devon’s future governance. Drawing on extensive engagement, national best practice, and local innovation, our 4-5-1 model enables a governance structure that is both locally rooted and strategically coherent. Through mechanisms such as Neighbourhood Area Committees and Local Community Networks, we will embed subsidiarity and participatory decision-making into the fabric of each new unitary authority. These structures will build on the strengths of town and parish councils, enabling co-designed services, delegated funding, and collaborative delivery.

Our approach is informed by successful models being promoted by Districts and deployed across Devon, demonstrating how place-based partnerships can drive inclusive growth and wellbeing. We also propose indicative councillor numbers that reflect the distinct needs of rural and urban communities, ensuring fair representation and accessibility. By aligning governance with lived experience and community identity, our model empowers residents to shape services, influence investment, and lead change.

This is not just a reorganisation, it is a reimagining of how public services can be delivered with, by, and for the communities they serve.

Criteria six focuses on the ability for an option to create stronger community engagement and empower neighbourhoods to deliver better representation for residents. According to guidance provided by the government, there are two key areas that we address throughout this section:

Criteria 6a	Creating strong community engagement
Criteria 6b	Building on existing community engagement

How 4-5-1 will effectively empower our neighbourhoods and enable strong community engagement

Our model for three unitary authorities enables a governance structure powered by the very heart of the County – local Devon communities. Three reasonably sized authorities shaped by local needs and local identity lay the foundation for governance that is responsive, locally led and tailored by the needs of individual communities. Our model creates engaged and empowered communities through:

- **Enabling continued innovation in community led bodies and local partnerships.**

Community members best understand their own needs and challenges and should be considered experts in understanding and inputting into local issues. Our model enables a platform to learn from and continue to innovate in established community engaged initiatives across Devon, such as One Ilfracombe and the Bideford Regeneration Board. These initiatives are community focused and hyper local by design, bringing together residents, businesses and service providers to improve communities and local engagement. A community focused model like ours enables us to use these as templates for local engagement across the County.

- **Better representing communities on the wider Devon stage.**

Our model reflects the geographies and communities of Devon. By keeping this demographic focus, we enable our communities to have a clear voice in wider decision making. Residents will not need to struggle to be heard or represented by expansive authorities that struggle to understand their local issues. They will have an equal voice along with other communities in Devon, ensuring they can contribute to future development across the County.

- **Improving the way services recognise and meet local needs.**

Our model provides a platform to expand nationally recognised, community focused service models across the County, such as Torbay's Adult and Children's Social Care approach. Our model's strength is the ability to tailor services to local needs, delivered through community hubs that bring residents and service providers together. This approach allows residents to always be in reach of services and outcomes that are designed around their specific needs, who will have equitable access no matter their location or distance from Council buildings. Similarly, in Mid Devon, the Zed Pods initiative has transformed underused garage plots into zero-carbon modular homes, tailored to local needs and built with community input.

CASE STUDY

Torridge Place Board

The Torridge Place Board was formed in February 2024 to establish genuine place leadership for what would become Torridge's Community Regeneration Partnership with MHCLG.

The Board, made up of 20 representatives from a cross section of local businesses and services, has been responsible for shaping and overseeing the overall programme of works for the £20m scheme of government investment designed to improve the long-term economic, environmental and health wellbeing for the community in Torridge.

The Board's diverse perspectives, representing social housing providers, industry leads, the NHS, the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere and the public sector, enabled a broad range of skills and intelligence could be brought to the creation of the investment proposals and a strong degree of rigour to oversight of delivery.



CASE STUDY

One Ilfracombe

In the coastal town of Ilfracombe, North Devon, a bold initiative emerged to transform the way public services are delivered. One Ilfracombe was born out of a shared recognition among local stakeholders that traditional service models, often fragmented and agency-centric, were failing to meet the nuanced needs of individuals and the community. The solution? A locally led, non-political, business-minded body designed to "rewire public services" around people, not bureaucracy.

The journey began with a clear vision: to create a structure that could coordinate services more efficiently, foster collaboration, and empower the community. This led to the formation of two interlinked entities. First, Ilfracombe Town Council stepped up to represent the community voice. Second, a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee was established to coordinate public services and town-wide activities.

The One Ilfracombe Board became the operational heart of this vision. It brought together a diverse coalition of partners, including Ilfracombe Town Council, Devon County Council, North Devon Council, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, North Devon Homes, and North Devon Healthcare

Trust. Each organisation nominated directors to the board, while independent director positions were openly advertised and filled through a community-inclusive selection process.

One Ilfracombe's objectives are ambitious yet grounded in practical community needs. It aims to streamline service delivery, reduce duplication, and foster innovation by aligning agencies around shared goals. The board acts as a catalyst for change, breaking down silos and encouraging joint working across sectors. Whether it's tackling health inequalities, improving housing, or enhancing public safety, the initiative is driven by a commitment to local empowerment and evidence-based solutions.

What sets One Ilfracombe apart is its emphasis on credibility and sustainability. It's not just a talking shop, it's a functioning body with real influence, built on trust and transparency. By embedding community representation and fostering cross-sector collaboration, it ensures that decisions reflect local priorities and deliver tangible outcomes.

One Ilfracombe is a pioneering model for place-based public service reform. It demonstrates how a small town can lead big change by putting people at the centre of governance. Through its innovative structure and inclusive ethos, it continues to shape a future where services are not just delivered – but designed – with the community in mind.

CASE STUDY

Bideford Regeneration Board

Town centres play a vital role in the daily life of Devon. While the region's market towns are renowned for their beauty, they often grapple with longstanding challenges, including housing, skills shortages, and employment concerns. The absence of cohesive leadership or a shared vision frequently exacerbates these issues, hindering the effective deployment of collective resources.

To address these challenges, the Bideford Regeneration Board was established in 2022 as part of the Devon-wide Urban Renewal programme. Bideford, having emerged from the Covid pandemic as the most economically affected town in Devon, demonstrated a pressing need for renewed collective action.

By 2025, a refreshed public-private Board convened, following an open call for new members with expertise in strategy



development, finance, governance, marketing, education, and place-making. This diverse group complements the strategic partnership of Bideford Town Council, Torridge District Council, Devon County Council, Bideford Bridge Trust, The Burton at Bideford, TTVS, and sixth formers from Bideford College.

The Board collaborated with Torridge District Council and Devon County Council to commission a comprehensive masterplan for Bideford. Working alongside local and national stakeholders, the Board helped develop a new regeneration strategy, fostering a whole-system approach and laying the groundwork for an exciting new chapter in the town's rich history.



CASE STUDY

North Devon+ Partnership

ND+ is a not-for-profit public-private partnership, jointly owned by North Devon and Torridge District Councils. ND+ delivers a wide range of support services tailored to the needs of rural and coastal communities. Since 2015, it has:

Supported over 4,800 small businesses and helped create more than 600 jobs.

Delivered over £12.3 million in grant funding through Business BOOST (UKPSF), Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), LEADER5, Regional Growth Fund (RGF), and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).

Enabled local SMEs to start, grow, and innovate—particularly in sectors like clean maritime, green energy, creative industries and, critically, agriculture.

From involvement in the earliest test pilots of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), and then through every iteration of the Future Farming Resilience Fund (FFR) ND+ has been there working in partnership with other local bodies, including the NFU, North Devon UNESCO, local authority planners and farmers to create support and impact at a time of both challenge and collective opportunity.

As a delivery partner, advocate and convenor the unique model and trusted relationships built up over time mean that ND+ is ideally positioned to be at the heart of future delivery across Devon, ensuring that rural priorities are addressed and even the most isolated businesses are supported to grow and flourish.



Figure: Current councillor arrangements

Council	Members	Total wards	Multi wards	Population	Electorate	Electorate ratio
East Devon	60	30	18	156,167	126,436	2,107
Exeter	39	13	13	137,050	91,121	2,336
Mid Devon	42	22	15	84,148	65,778	1,566
North Devon	42	25	12	100,543	79,672	1,897
Plymouth	57	20	20	268,736	196,496	3,447
South Hams	31	20	9	90,842	71,721	2,314
Teignbridge	47	24	18	137,074	106,864	2,274
Torbay	36	16	15	139,485	105,053	2,918
Torridge	36	16	15	68,830	54,073	1,502
West Devon	31	18	11	58,754	44,518	1,436
Devon County	60	58	2	833,408	640,183	10,670

Future councillor numbers

Current councillor arrangements in Devon

Devon is currently served by 481 councillors across eleven councils: eight district and borough councils, two existing unitary authorities and one county council. Within this representation, electorate ratios vary from 1,436 in West Devon up to 10,670 in Devon County Council. The average ratio across existing district and borough councils is 1,928. For residents living outside unitary authorities, representation within upper tier authorities tends to be limited. Transitioning to unitary authorities will lower the ratio of electorate to councillors responsible for services traditionally managed at the upper tier, including education, transportation, and social services. Our approach directly supports the government criteria by ensuring that our 4-5-1 model delivers effective and proportionate representation. By aligning councillor numbers with the scale and diversity of each

unitary, we ensure that governance remains accessible and responsive. The indicative ratios demonstrate that our model is not only administratively efficient but also strengthens local democracy – giving communities a stronger voice in decision-making. This will mean a net benefit in representation for the residents of Devon as a whole.

Research conducted into unitary authority representation

To inform our thinking into indicative future councillor numbers for Devon, we performed research into all recent examples of Local Government Reorganisation across the country. We examined the variation in terms of single and multi-member divisions, with some having an average of over two members per division and others one member per division. Our focus was on the proportion of electorate to councillors, in line with the latest guidance from the Boundary Commission.

Figure: Unitary authorities used as research to inform indicative councillor numbers in Devon

Unitary Authority	Established	Avg Ratio (Electorate)
Dorset	April 2019	3,631
Buckinghamshire	April 2020	4,336
North Northamptonshire	April 2021	3,881
West Northamptonshire	April 2021	4,048
Somerset	April 2023	4,061
Cumberland	April 2023	4,709
Westmorland & Furness	April 2023	2,718
North Yorkshire	April 2023	5,317
Average		4,088

Indicative future councillor numbers

Using the research detailed above, we have produced indicative future councillor numbers for each of our proposed unitary authorities. When considering the number of members needed to effectively represent the electorate of a post-LGR Devon, we considered the following factors alongside our research and Boundary Commission guidance:

- Delivering the right number of members to achieve the strategic, decision-making and representative roles of each new authority.
- Ensuring each councillor represents a similar number of electors.
- Utilising existing boundaries as building blocks, using Divisions, Wards and Parishes where possible.
- Creating boundaries that are appropriate and reflect community ties and identities.

In line with current guidance, our indicative councillor numbers are based on a single electorate ratio for the entire population of each proposed unitary authority footprint. However, we recognised that rural and urban areas face different challenges, with rural areas facing additional barriers to effective

representation through geography, associated travel time and the number of parish councils that need to be supported. To better meet these different demands, we propose that areas would benefit from having different electorate to councillor ratios for rural and urban wards working around the average ‘electorate ratios’ shown in the table below, an idea we are open to exploring with the Boundary Commission.

Councillors play a crucial role as the bridge between local communities and the unitary authority, championing the interests of residents, towns and parishes within the wider governance framework. In our proposed new unitary structure, strengthening the role of councillors is essential to ensure that local voices are heard and acted upon. By aligning councillor numbers with both population size and the distinct needs of rural and urban areas, we make the role more manageable and sustainable. Our approach allows councillors to dedicate sufficient time to engaging with constituents, understanding community priorities, and representing their interests effectively. The suggested councillor numbers for each authority are carefully justified to balance the need for strong, accessible local representation with the practicalities

Figure: Indicative future councillor numbers by unitary authority

Unitary Authority		Population	Electorate	Electorate ratio	Indicative Councillors
4	South Hams	426,155	328,156	3,953	83
	Teignbridge				
	Torbay				
	West Devon				
5	East Devon	546,738	417,080	4,437	94
	Exeter				
	Mid Devon				
	North Devon				
1	Torridge	268,736	196,496	3,447	57
	Plymouth				
Grand Total		1,241,629	941,732	4,024 (ave.)	234

For comparison electorate ratios for Cornwall are as follows:

Unitary Authority		Population	Electorate	Electorate ratio	Indicative Councillors
Cornwall		583,289	434,438	4,994	87

of governance, ensuring that every area has a meaningful voice and that councillors are empowered to drive positive change for their communities.

Our councillor numbers are only indicative to inform future thinking once unitary authorities are fully established. Any future councillor numbers will be determined by the Boundary Commission, and there will likely need to be interim arrangements put in place for shadow authorities during the transition period. However, the indicative councillor numbers analysis demonstrates that our 4-5-1 model provides solid representation and stronger localism. By designing councils with balanced populations and ward structures, we ensure that residents are not lost in large, impersonal governance systems. Instead, each community retains meaningful access to decision-makers. Our 4-5-1 approach embeds fairness and accessibility into the heart of future governance in Devon.

Within the wider context of the ambition for a future South West Mayoral Strategic Authority through devolution, we have compared our indicative councillor numbers to Cornwall's

existing governance. We can see that at a similar scale to our proposed Northern Devon unitary, Cornwall has a similar number of councillors at 87 under current arrangements. Additionally, under a Mayoral Strategic Authority, the similar numbers of councillors between each authority would ensure an equal voice and that no area loses out on representation within the wider area.

Empowering Devon neighbourhoods

Neighbourhood governance will be a core part of our approach, ensuring local voices remain central to decision-making, service oversight, and community engagement. Our model, working with residents and their locally elected Town and Parish representatives and councils to find the best fit, proposes a layered structure, beginning with Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) that reflect the distinct identities and needs of communities across each new unitary footprint. These NACs will be co-designed with partners and communities to operate at a scale that is close enough to be local, while being embedded in a wider

system that is big enough to stay strong. Building on this foundation, Local Community Networks (LCNs) will act as an extension of NACs—bringing together key stakeholders such as town and parish councils, ward members, police, health services, and voluntary sector partners to focus on place-based issues. This dual structure ensures that neighbourhood governance is not only representative but also operationally effective.

However, our model also recognises that the aspect of co-design will be the most important precursor to success in this space. Neighbourhood empowerment only works if principal councils are sufficiently agile and adaptive to have different conversations and channels across its area. This is one of the main challenges with today's perceptions of 'distant and remote' decision-making. Our model recognises that this is partly about spatial distance, but equally, if not more so, about cultural distance between councils that commission services at scale, undifferentiated by need or appropriateness, to those who root solutions in the needs of distinct and discrete places and people. Tailoring interventions to the health and wealth needs of localities and individuals will enable these future councils to address social mobility and inequality that is masked within the aggregated geography of larger councils.

The introduction of LCNs offers a powerful mechanism to connect hyper-local insight with strategic planning. While NACs will provide democratic oversight and a potential forum for participatory budgeting and service co-design, LCNs will enhance this by enabling collaborative delivery of local projects and fostering community cohesion. These networks, inspired by the learning from experiences in Somerset, will not be formal decision-making bodies of the council, but they will be empowered through delegated funding and influence. This approach ensures that community priorities are not only heard but acted upon—creating a governance through-line from the grassroots to the unitary authority and ultimately to the CCA. It also aligns with the DCMS Civil Society Covenant, promoting deeper collaboration, participation, and transparency between government and society.



We also know from our engagement with Devon Association of Local Councils ('DALC') that the town and parish council sector is keen to see a new enhanced role for itself, working with the new unitary councils for the benefit of our communities. DALC have carried out extensive engagement with its member councils across Devon and issued a position statement which has helped to shape our proposal.

Across Devon, district councils have demonstrated a strong commitment to working with towns and parishes, providing a solid foundation for interaction with unitaries in the future, taking their views seriously and working collaboratively to address local challenges.

DALC has set out that it is supportive of the establishment of new parish councils in areas that are currently unparished and have offered to support new unitaries with this process, support which we will welcome during implementation.

Our 4-5-1 proposal very much aligns with the ambitions set out by DALC. We too see Town and Parish Councils as a crucial conduit for

conveying community messages to the new unitary councils and see them playing a key role of helping shape the design of future service delivery models. Our proposal sets out new mechanisms for consulting and engaging including through the new Local Community Networks which will see Town and Parish Councils as core and influential members.

By embedding LCNs within our proposed governance framework, Devon will be well-positioned to support the wider devolution agenda. These networks will serve as vital conduits for local intelligence, enabling the unitary authorities to respond more effectively to the lived realities of residents. They will also provide a platform for joint commissioning, strategic planning, and integrated service delivery—particularly in areas such as transport, housing, and health. This model ensures that local priorities are not lost in regional strategies but instead inform and shape them. Over time, the design and function of both NACs and LCNs will be reviewed and refined in partnership with communities, ensuring that governance remains dynamic, inclusive, and responsive to changing needs.

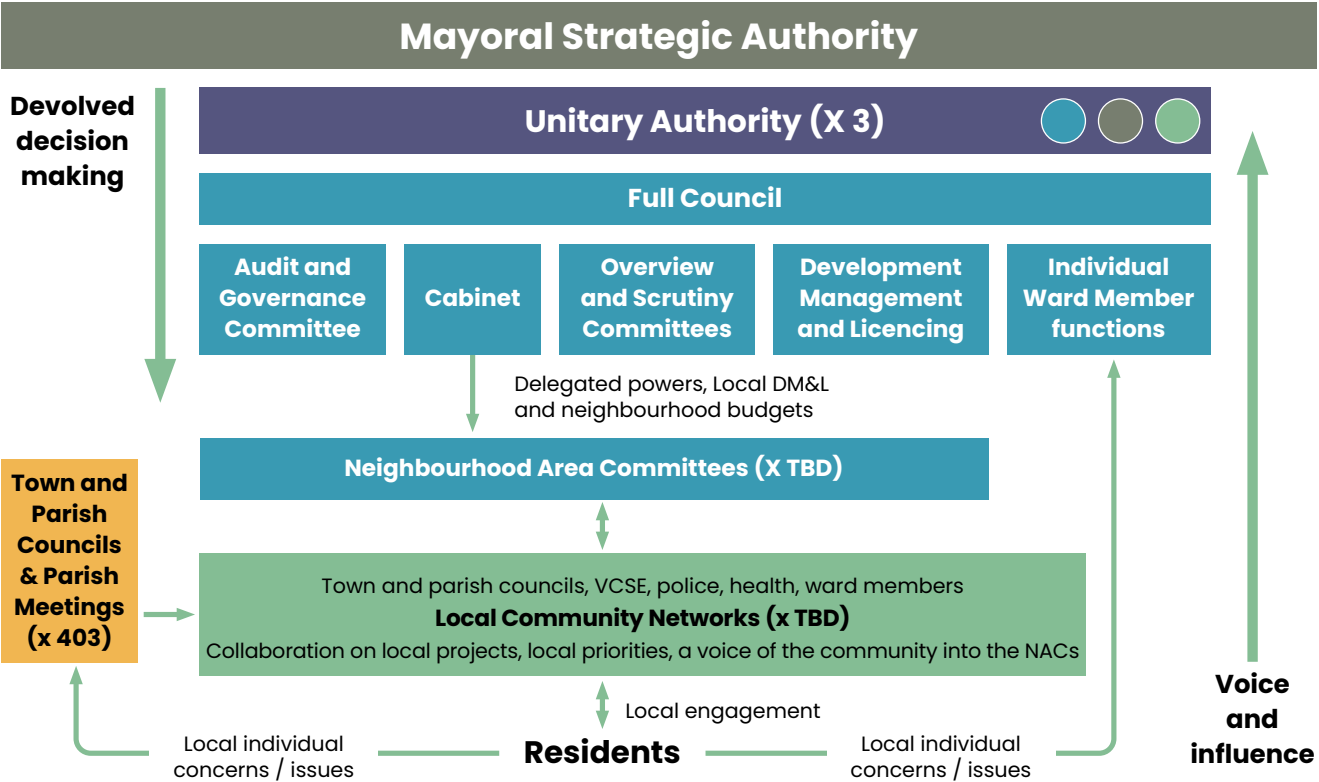


Figure: Model showing the future relationship between the resident and governance structures



Preserving Exeter’s civic and ceremonial role

While the government’s guidance on local governance has referenced options such as neighbourhood area committees, our proposal recognises the unique, unparished nature of Exeter’s local governance and the city’s distinguished civic and ceremonial heritage. It is essential that any new arrangements not only maintain but actively safeguard Exeter’s city status, its Lord Mayor, and the rich traditions that underpin its identity as a Cathedral city.

One way to ensure Exeter’s civic and ceremonial status is preserved through local government reorganisation would be to establish Charter Trustees for the city. These Trustees could serve as guardians of Exeter’s historic civic identity, maintaining the continuity of the Lord Mayor’s office and the city’s ceremonial traditions. This arrangement would allow the city’s civic functions to continue seamlessly during and after the transition, until such time as a parish or alternative governance structure is established. In this way, Exeter’s unique status and heritage would be protected throughout the period of change.

In shaping this approach, we have considered the experience of other Cathedral cities that have undergone similar reorganisations. We recognise Exeter’s historic, civic and ceremonial status. Drawing on best practice, and the

ambitions of the Cathedral Cities Group, we suggest the establishment of Charter Trustees for the city to maintain continuity of the Lord Mayor’s office and associated city ceremonial traditions. This would allow for appropriate new local city area governance to be co-designed with the city’s community representatives, while protecting the civic and ceremonial leadership of our city for generations to come.

Crucially, our proposal emphasises that any new local governance for Exeter should be co-designed with the city’s civic leaders and community representatives. Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all model or treating the city as a mere ‘neighbourhood’ under government guidance, we are committed to working collaboratively to determine the most appropriate and effective arrangements for Exeter. This approach respects the city’s distinct needs and aspirations and ensures that the valued historical context of its ceremonial civic status is preserved and enhanced.

By recognising the ceremonial and cultural importance of Exeter’s place in Devon, and by embedding robust mechanisms such as Charter Trustees, our proposal assures that the city’s civic status and history will be retained and celebrated as local governance evolves. At the same time, Exeter will benefit from the scale, reach, and influence of a new authority aligned with the government’s ambitions for size, impact, and effectiveness—ensuring that its unique identity is both protected and empowered for the future.

Section 5: Financial case for change

Financial context

Along with analysis presented under Criteria 2 on the balance of future estimated core funding between the proposed unitary authorities, **Option C: 4-5-1** is concluded, and proven to be financially viable, and equitable across the three unitary councils.

The 4-5-1 delivers financial sustainability and positions the new councils to succeed as large, strong, robust, and financially resilient institutions, reflective of their places and empowered to meet the needs of their communities. The new unitaries will be fit for purpose local government organisations that can unlock efficiencies to reinvest in services to further drive improvements in service quality.

In reviewing the options, we have found the 4-5-1 proposal to be the strongest choice to address financial pressures, rising service demand and the constraints of the current two tier system. This preferred model enables significant service redesign and transformation, unlocking notable efficiencies through a placed-based approach, as demonstrated in our financial modelling.

Our proposal is designed to address rising service pressures and long-term financial challenges, evidenced through robust financial analysis. This balances the costs of reconfiguring and aggregating services, recurring savings and implementation costs, while unlocking transformation opportunities to enhance service delivery and efficiency.

Through our financial modelling, we have considered two financial scenarios, a base case that adopts a more prudent view and which we believe can be readily delivered, against a stretched case that represents a more ambitious programme of change to deliver transformation and higher level of savings which our new councils will strive for.

The analysis indicates that our preferred option, Option C: 4-5-1 will breakeven in 2 years and 9 months and will deliver annual gross recurring savings of £77.074 million per year in the Base case. In the stretch case the savings increase to £124.466 million per year, under a more ambitious scenario (with a breakeven period of 2 years and 11 months due to a higher level of implementation costs).

South Hams

The estimated savings under our preferred 4-5-1 option represents 3.5% (base case) and 5.7% (stretch case) of actual net revenue expenditure which totals £2.2 billion in the region and these savings are assessed as achievable and balanced through reorganisation alone. These savings can be achieved by moving to the three unitary model which will enable savings to be realised quickly by having a clear break from previous authorities in the southern and northern unitary part of the model. This will necessitate new and dynamic leadership to drive the organisational culture change and the implementation of new ways of working required achieve consistently high quality service standards whilst keeping close control of budgets to drive organisational efficiency.

These efficiencies would be in addition to the quality improvements in services as outlined in **Criteria 3** of this document.

Our strategic approach would ensure our new unitary councils are resilient against known service pressures and potential future shocks, while improving outcomes and responsiveness.

Overview of financial sustainability analysis

A key consideration of this proposal is the financial sustainability analysis whose purpose is to evaluate the financial implications of structural reform across Devon. This assessment considers whether the proposed reorganisation delivers measurable, long-term improvements in financial resilience, efficiency, and value for money. The analysis provides a structured, evidence-based appraisal of potential savings, required investment, and net benefit.

Context and purpose

Across Devon, collectively, the existing councils spend approximately £2.2 billion on delivering services for a population of 1.241 million residents, while contending with rising demand for social care and housing, and uncertainty in funding growth. The current structure, in two-tier areas, leads to duplication of some roles and functions,

fragmented service delivery, and inefficiencies in support functions, digital infrastructure, and decision-making.

Our proposal comes at an opportune time considering wider reforms being proposed in Local Government to streamline governance, transform services tailored to local needs, and release efficiencies. However, it also requires upfront investment and, like all local government reorganisation processes, will involve careful financial management during transition. This makes it critical to assess whether, over a realistic implementation horizon, the financial benefits outweigh the costs, and whether the new authorities would be more resilient and sustainable than the status quo (it is acknowledged that the status quo is contrary to wider government policy objectives, however it is still imperative to demonstrate the value for money achieved in proposing this model against the status quo as a reference case).

The financial sustainability analysis therefore aims to:

- Quantify the financial impact of the preferred reorganisation options.
- Compare the estimated savings, costs, and payback periods for the preferred option under two scenarios, a base case and stretched case
- Demonstrate the financial viability and strength of the evaluated scenarios
- Provide confidence in assumptions, modelling approach, and scenario flexibility.

Methodology overview

The financial analysis applied here combines a tried and tested methodology, benchmarked against other local government reorganisation processes and aligned with government guidance and financial expertise from Local Government professionals. The steps included:

- 1. Scoping and agreement of method**

 - Worked with appointed finance lead(s) to define scope, financial principles, and data needs.
 - Agreed on the options to be modelled and the treatment of shared services and reconfiguration.
- 2. Data collection and validation**

 - Collated publicly available information from MHCLG data sources.
 - Gathered standardised data requests for all involved councils, covering revenue budgets, reserves, balance sheets, and key service metrics, from the centralised Devon Data Hub.
- 3. Baseline construction**

 - Built a consolidated financial baseline, combining district, unitary and county expenditure levels into unified figures based on agreed assumptions e.g. relative needs formulae.
- 4. Savings estimation**

 - Applied standardised top-down models to estimate savings across key categories:
 - Senior management and democratic structures
 - Corporate and back-office services
 - ICT rationalisation and systems integration
 - Estates and asset rationalisation
 - Procurement and contract consolidation
 - Service transformation and demand management (where credible)
- 5. Implementation cost estimation**

 - Incorporated both direct (cashable) and enabling (efficiency) savings.
 - Used a combination of local inputs and benchmark data from other local government reorganisation programmes to calibrate assumptions.
- 6. Realignment costs**

 - Identified one-off costs required to deliver the reorganisation, including:
 - Programme management and transition team costs
 - Redundancy and pension strain
 - ICT integration or separation
 - Property and rebranding
 - Legal and governance setup
 - Costs were phased over a 5-year period, with timing aligned to implementation logic.
- 7. Scenario modelling**

 - The nature of the preferred option means that existing authorities will be re-organised rather than creating an additional unitary authorities and therefore ongoing increased upper-tier costs are not expected.
 - Developed a structured financial model that calculates, for each scenario:
 - Annual and cumulative savings
 - Phased implementation costs
 - Year-on-year net benefit
 - Breakeven year
 - Total 10-year net financial benefit

Items considered in the financial case

Our financial analysis integrates a wide range of inputs and assumptions, grouped into two main elements:

- **Recurring Savings:** Cashable savings expected once reorganisation is complete and steady state is reached. These cover workforce reductions, systems rationalisation, contract management, and operating model changes. Savings are categorised by source, with baselines derived from current budgets.
- **Implementation Costs:** One-off costs required to implement the preferred option, typically incurred over the first five years. This includes programme delivery, ICT, staff redundancy, estates changes, and transitional double running.

Scenario-based modelling approach

Recognising the inherent uncertainty in savings realisation and implementation cost delivery, the analysis uses two financial scenarios to present the likely outcomes:

Scenario	Description
Base Case	The most likely scenario based on agreed central assumptions. Balances prudent savings estimates with realistic implementation ambition, aligned to local capability. This includes organisational savings, service-level savings, and half of the social care savings.
Stretch Case	A more ambitious but achievable scenario, assuming bolder service transformation, more aggressive rationalisation, and faster delivery. Also assumes more investment in digital and commercial capacity. This includes organisational savings, service-level savings at higher unit cost assumptions, and full social care savings.

This scenario-based approach provides a range of potential outcomes and supports sensitivity analysis. Each scenario uses the same methodology but varies assumptions across:

- Percentage of savings by category
- One-off cost estimates
- Degree of service transformation



This enables our financial case to:

- Demonstrate the robustness of the evaluated options under different delivery environments.
- Quantify the risk and upside potential of reorganisation.
- Support stakeholder discussions on ambition vs feasibility.

Outputs and use in the proposal

For each scenario and option, our model outputs:

- Gross and net annual savings
- Cumulative implementation costs
- Payback period (breakeven year)
- Total net benefit over 10 years

These outputs inform both the financial case and supports the viability of the preferred option for reorganisation in Devon.

Financial implications of the preferred option (the 4-5-1 Option)

This section sets out the financial outlook and sustainability of the preferred option within our proposal.

The purpose of this section is to consolidate and explain the end-state financial profile of the new councils. It brings together detailed evidence and modelling outputs across all relevant dimensions of local authority finance. This includes projected revenue budgets, the distribution and sufficiency of reserves and balances, and the scale and timing of both anticipated savings and implementation costs. A critical component is the breakeven analysis, which models how quickly upfront investment in reorganisation will be recouped through long-term efficiencies. Taken together, these elements enable a judgement on the long-term financial viability of the new authority structure and whether it provides a credible route to enhanced sustainability compared to the status quo.

To structure this analysis, the section is organised into four sub-sections:

- **Savings and efficiencies:** An estimate of recurrent savings achievable from reorganisation, including staff, systems, governance, and estate rationalisation.
- **Implementation and ongoing costs:** A detailed breakdown of one-off transition costs required to achieve the reorganisation, including redundancy, ICT, and programme delivery, alongside the incurred costs of realigning (and



aggregating/merging where required) services across Devon to three unitary authorities (with Plymouth City remaining on its own existing boundary).

- **Breakeven and 10-year outlook:** A forward-looking payback analysis that tracks the net financial benefit of reorganisation over a [ten-year period] and illustrates improved fiscal resilience.
- **Other considerations:** Consideration of other financial factors alongside the impact of transformation.

Each subsection includes validated financial inputs, analytical findings, and clearly explained narrative commentary. To aid interpretation and support transparency, visualisations such as summary tables, charts, and cumulative impact graphs are used throughout.

Ultimately, this section forms the evidential backbone of our financial case for reorganisation. It ensures that decision-makers, including Section 151 Officers, programme sponsors, and central government stakeholders, have a clear and comprehensive view of the fiscal implications of the proposal. By articulating a clear path from current-state finances to the post-reorganisation end-state, and quantifying the value that the change can deliver, this section helps confirm that our proposal is not only achievable, but financially sustainable.

Option summary – Evaluation of Option C: 4-5-1 model

A summary view of the financial impact of reorganisation according to the Option C: 4-5-1 is outlined in the below tables for each scenario, base and stretched case. Further information regarding the estimated recurring savings, and one-off implementation costs are outlined in the subsequent sections and the Financial Technical Appendices.

Overall, the financial analysis confirms that our preferred option and both scenarios within this deliver a positive net financial benefit, achieves payback within a short period, and places the new authorities on a stronger financial footing than under the status quo.

While the payback period for the Stretch case is marginally longer than the base case, due to higher one-off implementation costs offsetting the benefit of higher savings, the cumulative net financial benefit to the region by the end of a ten-year period is greater. In essence, the greater investment in transformational change in the stretch case delivers a slightly longer initial payback, but with greater benefits over the medium and long-term.

Option C: 4-5-1	Base Case	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

Deliverability and payback

There is confidence in the estimated level of Organisational Savings which can support the payback period modelled should the service-related savings (Non-Social Care and Social Care) either slip due to delays in implementation or not deliver due to unforeseen circumstances.

Savings and efficiency opportunities from reorganisation

This subsection outlines the projected savings from local government reorganisation, based on anticipated efficiencies from service integration, workforce reduction, streamlined governance and shared infrastructure. The estimates are built from both top-down modelling and local data inputs. Scenarios include the base and stretch savings estimates.

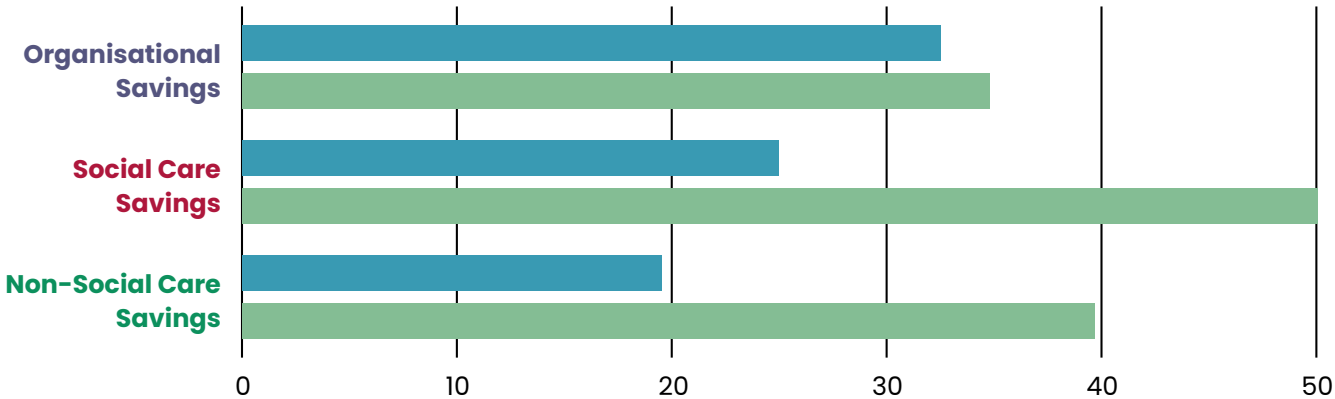
Reorganisation is projected to generate recurring savings of £77.1 million annually by Year 6 (£124.5 million in the stretched case), equivalent to 3.5% (5.7% in stretched case) of combined revenue spend of £2.2 billion to deliver services to residents across Devon).

Approach to estimating savings

Summary of savings

The graph below shows savings estimates by category for the base case and stretched case which are estimated to generate **£77.1 million** and **£124.5 million** respectively:

Base Case and Stretch Case Estimated Savings by Type (£'m)



Key:

- Organisational savings:
- Optimising Leadership
 - Right Sizing the Organisation
 - Consolidating Corporate Services
 - Improved Digital and IT Systems
 - Asset and Property Optimisation
- Social Care savings:
- Childrens’ Social Care
 - Adult Social Care
- Non-Social Care Savings:
- Highways
 - Public Health
 - Housing
 - Culture
 - Environmental and Planning
 - Central
 - Other

■ Base Case (Total £77.1m)
■ Stretch Case (Total £124.5)

These savings underpin the financial case for change and position the new councils to achieve a more efficient and sustainable model of delivery. A summary table breaks down expected recurring savings by category (e.g. staffing, governance, IT, property) from Year 6.

Service Specific Savings	Base Case £'m	Stretch Case £'m
Highways	1.648	4.375
Children's Social Care	10.000	20.000
Adult Social Care	15.000	30.000
Public Health	2.162	3.603
Housing	0.971	5.865
Culture	1.511	7.987
Environmental and Planning	5.604	10.209
Central	2.647	2.647
Other	5.000	5.000
Sub-Total	44.543	89.686
Organisational Savings		
Optimising Leadership	7.145	7.145
Right Sizing the Organisation	22.338	28.430
Consolidating Corporate Services	2.735	2.735
Improved Digital & IT Systems	4.603	4.603
Asset and Property Optimisation	1.959	1.959
Sub-Total	38.780	44.872
7.5% Discount Factor (see below)*	(6.249)	(10.092)
Total Estimated Savings	77.074	124.466

*A discount factor of 7.5% on total savings has been applied to allow for addressing optimism bias in savings delivery.

Savings from organisational efficiencies

Organisational efficiencies were benchmarked against all Local Government Reorganisation cases since 2009 and uplifted to today's prices. Where only midpoint values were available, high and low ranges were derived by applying a single standard deviation above and below the midpoint.

This provided an evidenced-based average estimate of potential savings and converted into proxy percentages to apply to Revenue Account (RA) data for all councils, with savings for Plymouth being excluded and only including half of Torbay's savings, to reflect areas where either no changes are proposed or benefits of establishing a unitary authority have already been realised.

To maintain accuracy, elements of the RA data were structured to be mutually exclusive, ensuring no double counting of benefits.

Amongst organisational savings, the largest areas of savings are Right Sizing the Organisation (Base: £22.3 million. Stretched: £28.4 million) and Optimising Leadership (£7.1 million in both the base and stretched case).

Savings from social care (Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care)

Social care savings were derived from independent analysis of unit costs across the Devon area. The model harmonises these costs within the proposed Northern and Southern unitary authorities, applying the best observed unit rate in each area. This approach assumes that the most efficient unit cost can be achieved across the new unitary structure and calculates potential savings across a Northern and Southern unitary.

Adult Social Care

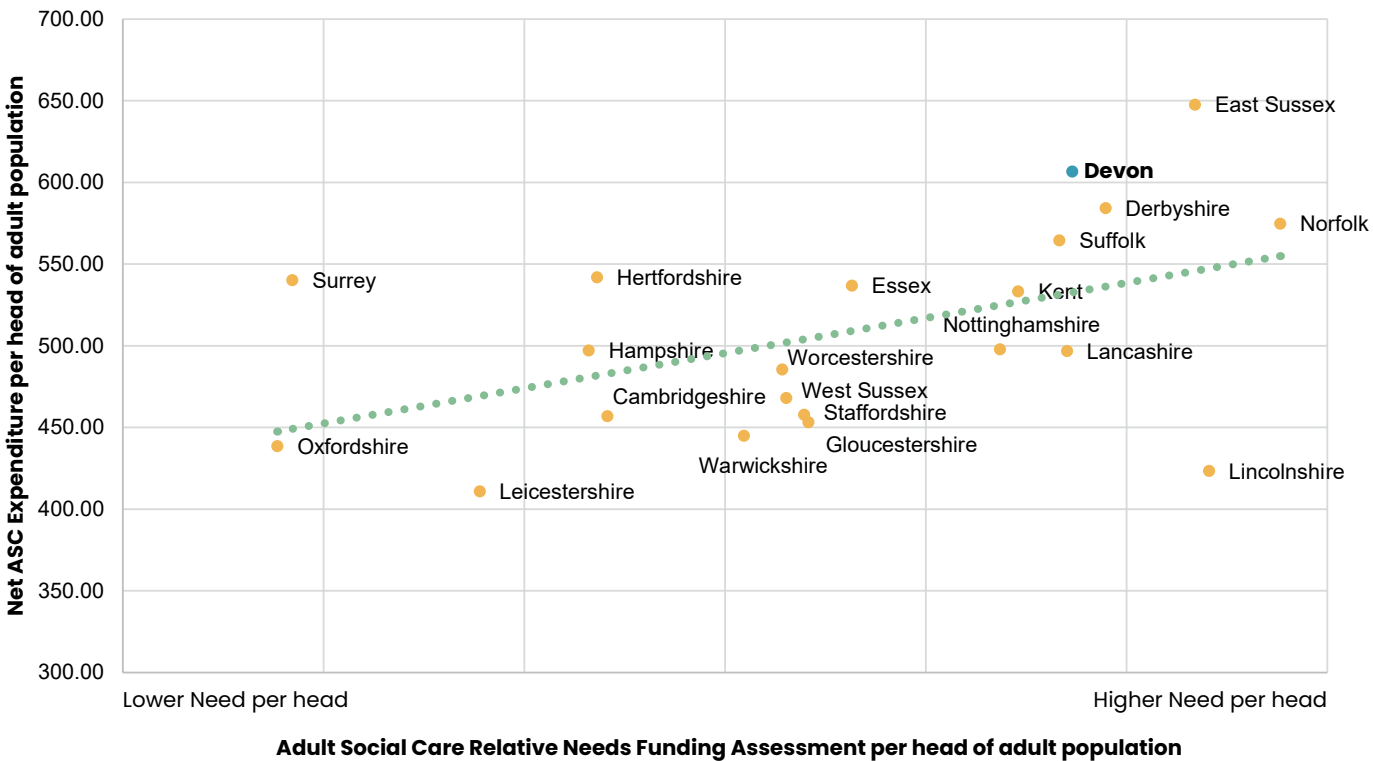
For Adult Social Care (ASC), this correlation between actual spend per head and ASC relative needs at a high-level indicates if an authority is spending at a level above their assessed need. The graph below compares this assessment of spending level for adult social care for all County Councils in England and this suggests that Devon County Council is spending considerably above its assessed need which gives rise to the opportunity under LGR to explore efficiencies and savings. Spend could be reduced in the medium-term.

In the 2023/24 financial year, Devon County Council was the second highest (spend per head of adult population) County Council on adult social care (£606.60 per head) out of the 21 County Councils in England as shown below.

The graph below illustrates this for Adult Social Care for the 21 County Councils.

Whilst Devon County Council are the second highest spend per head County Council, this is not due to how sparsely populated it is.

Correlation between 2023/24 Adult Social Care spend per head and Adult Social Care Relative Needs Formulae calculated as part of Government's Fair Funding 2.0 consultation



This is demonstrated by the fact that sparse counties such as Leicestershire and Lincolnshire spend significantly less per head on adult social care.

If Devon County Council were able to reduce their current spend per head (£606.60) to a level closer to Kent (£533.23), or even just closer to the national averages, it could potentially recognise significant revenue savings, after a transition period, of over £49m per annum. This provides a further level of assurance that the estimated adult social care savings proposed under this 4-5-1 option of £15m per annum in the Base Case and £30m per annum in the Stretch Case are prudent and achievable.

Lincolnshire (£423.35 per head) is a good comparison as the ‘relative need’ is similar to Devon, but demonstrates the amount of opportunities that arise if it is possible to perform to the same levels of cost efficiency as Lincolnshire, equating to revenue savings of over £124m per annum when compared to the amount currently spent by Devon County Council.

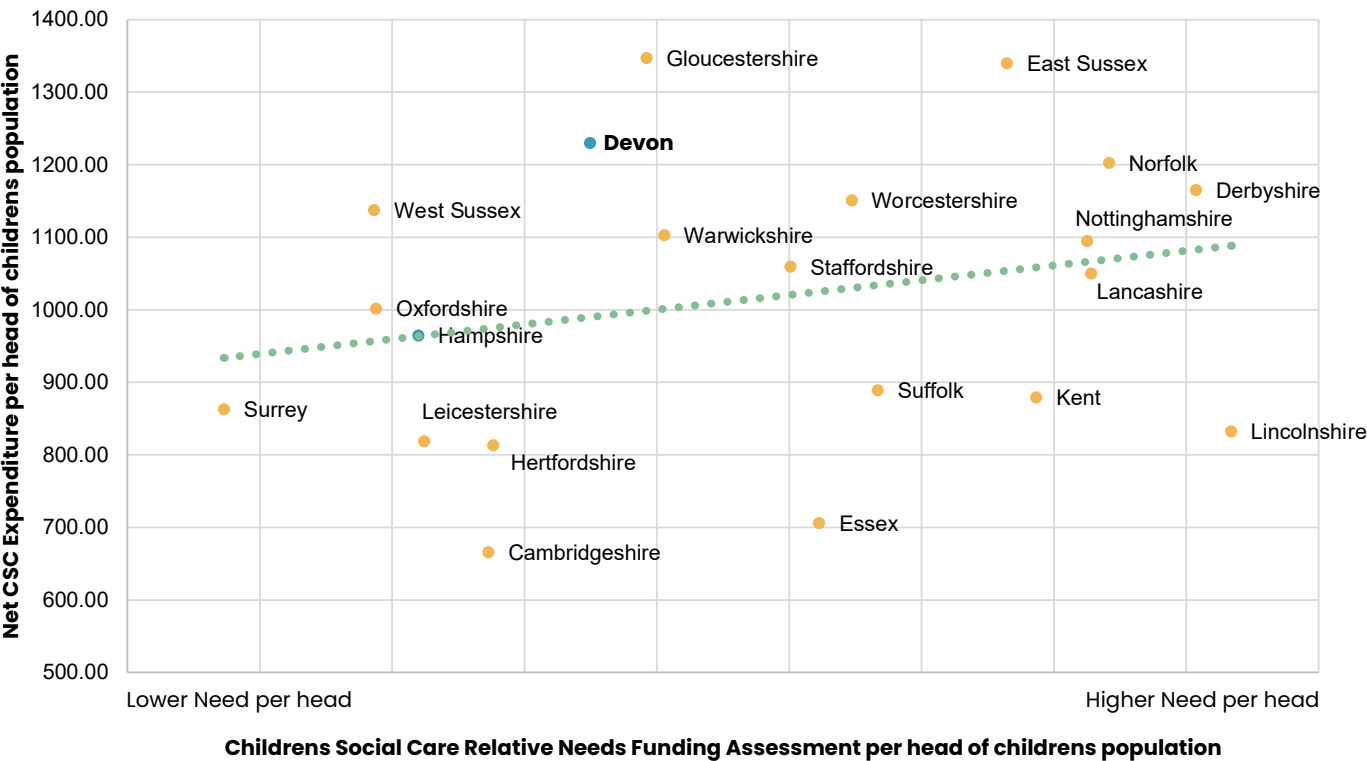
The 4-5-1 model with two new Northern and Southern Unitaries for adult social care would enable place-based leadership with an opportunity for health and social care integration, as is evidenced in the successful model currently operated within Torbay.

Children’s Social Care

For Childrens Social Care (CSC), this correlation between actual spend per head and CSC relative needs at a high-level indicates if an authority is spending at a level above their assessed need. The graph below compares this assessment of spending level for childrens social care for all County Councils in England and this demonstrates that Devon County Council is spending considerably above its assessed need which gives rise to the opportunity under LGR to explore efficiencies and savings.

In the 2023/24 financial year, Devon County Council was the third highest spend per head County Council (£1,230.04) on children’s social care out of the 21 County Councils in England as shown below. This is spend per head of children’s population.

Correlation between 2023/24 Children’s Social Care spend per head and Children’s Social Care Relative Needs Formulae calculated as part of Government’s Fair Funding 2.0 consultation



Whilst Devon County Council are the third highest spend per head County Council (£1,230.04), this is not solely due to how sparse Devon is as an area as an over-riding factor.

This is demonstrated by the fact that sparse counties such as Leicestershire and Lincolnshire spend significantly less per head on adult social care.

If Devon County Council were able to reduce their current spend per head (£1,230.04) to a level closer to Worcestershire (£1,150.97), or even just closer to the national averages, it could potentially recognise significant revenue savings of over £12m. This provides a further level of assurance that the estimated childrens social care savings proposed under this 4-5-1 option of £10m in the Base Case and £20m in the Stretch Case are prudent and achievable.

Worcestershire (£1,150.97 per head) is a good comparison as the ‘relative need’ is broadly similar to Devon, but even greater opportunities and efficiencies (approximately £62m) arise if it is possible to perform to the same levels of cost efficiency as Lincolnshire (£832.37 per head). Worcestershire received a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating for its Childrens services in January 2025 and Lincolnshire was also rated as ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted for its Childrens services in June 2023.

District Councils understand their local area through housing, planning and community services which can form an integrated service to improve how children’s social care is delivered. Early help and preventative measures through services such as leisure services can significantly reduce costs. Three unitaries will maintain local knowledge, whilst ensuring that budget pressures do not put services for children at risk.

Creating two new southern and northern unitaries will enable a cultural reset to embed a new approach and vision for children’s services. It will also enable greater strategic capacity by giving each DCS a smaller population to focus on and increase the scope for early intervention and preventative work.

Service-level savings

Service-level savings were informed by a detailed review of RA forms by Section 151 officers across Devon. On a sub-service basis, estimated savings percentages were applied to the revenue estimates for 2025/26. These savings are mutually exclusive from organisational savings, providing clarity and avoiding duplication, and remove Plymouth and half of Torbay from the savings calculation. Further, research into the best unit costs across the Devon area per RA category has been completed, to inform the top range of service-level savings.

From service-based savings, analysis suggests that the largest savings could be realised from efficiencies to social care services. To identify a scope of potential savings from efficiencies in social care, the level of actual spend has been compared to the Government’s latest assessment of relative needs.

Implementation and reconfiguration cost estimates

This subsection sets out the one-off costs required to implement the reorganisation which includes programme delivery, systems integration, estates changes, and workforce exit costs.

These costs are necessary enablers of the longer-term benefits and have been profiled over the implementation period.

As this is reorganisation of existing authorities in the region, it is not envisaged that there will be material increased ongoing costs that would typically arise when services or systems are split due to the creation of the new unitary authorities. **There are three upper tier councils in the Devon system currently, and our model proposes three unitaries in future in order to avoid excess costs, while taking the opportunity to better balance the size, scale and financial sustainability of these new councils, in order to demonstrate the financial robustness and resilience of each, as envisaged by Government in its assessment criteria.**

Implementation costs were calculated using benchmarks from previous LGR cases dating back to 2009, inflated to today’s prices. Where only midpoint values were available, high and low ranges were established using a single standard deviation above and below the midpoint. Costs were expressed as a per-head-of-population proxy and scaled to reflect the size of Devon, excluding Plymouth. These costs were then segmented into researched cost ranges to provide a total cost range.

Additional incremental costs were added for each saving line to account for the resources required to deliver those savings.

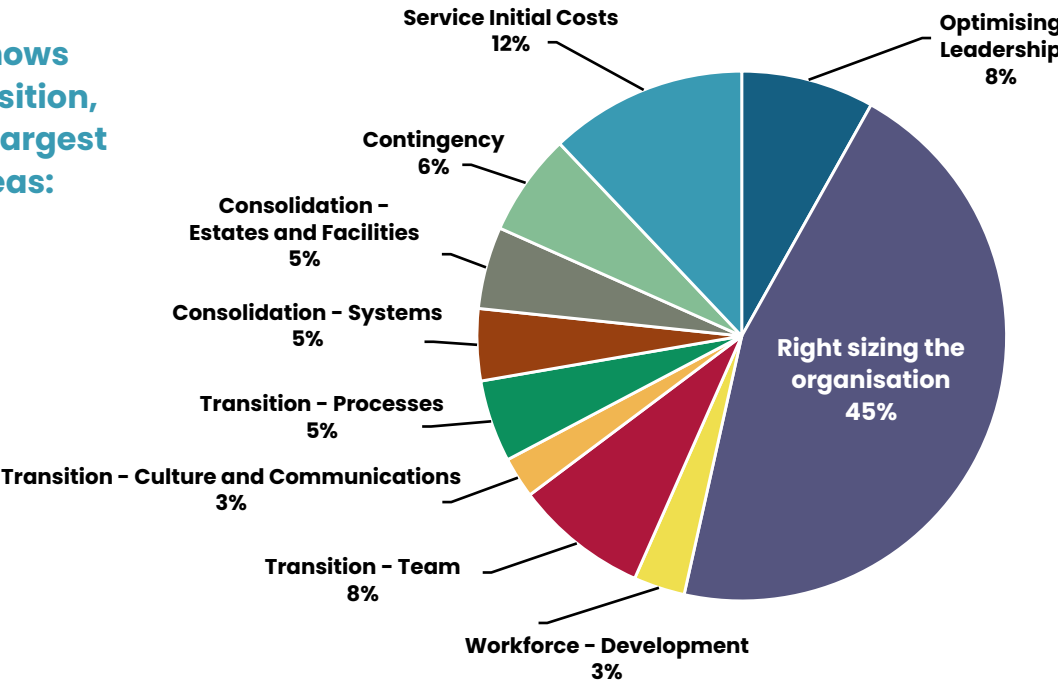
The total estimated implementation cost is £73.9 million (£101.0 million in Stretch) over a period of five years.

These costs are essential to unlock recurring efficiencies. There are no material reconfiguration costs envisaged as currently there are three upper tier management structures and service delivery functions, and in our proposed model there will be three unitary authorities, and it is therefore a case of realigning organisational remits and scope to better balance the new councils in Devon. The implementation costs are proportionate and supports a positive return on investment over the planning period.

A table of implementation costs by category is presented below:

Implementation Costs	Base Case £’m	Stretch Case £’m
Optimising Leadership	6.000	6.000
Right Sizing the Organisation	33.507	42.646
Workforce - Development	2.313	2.313
Transition - Team	6.013	6.013
Transition - Culture and Communications	1.850	1.850
Transition - Processes	3.700	3.700
Consolidation - Systems	3.238	3.238
Consolidation - Estates and Facilities	3.700	3.700
Contingency	4.626	4.626
Service Initial Costs	8.909	26.906
Total Implementation Costs	73.856	100.992

The pie chart shows the cost composition, identifying the largest expenditure areas:



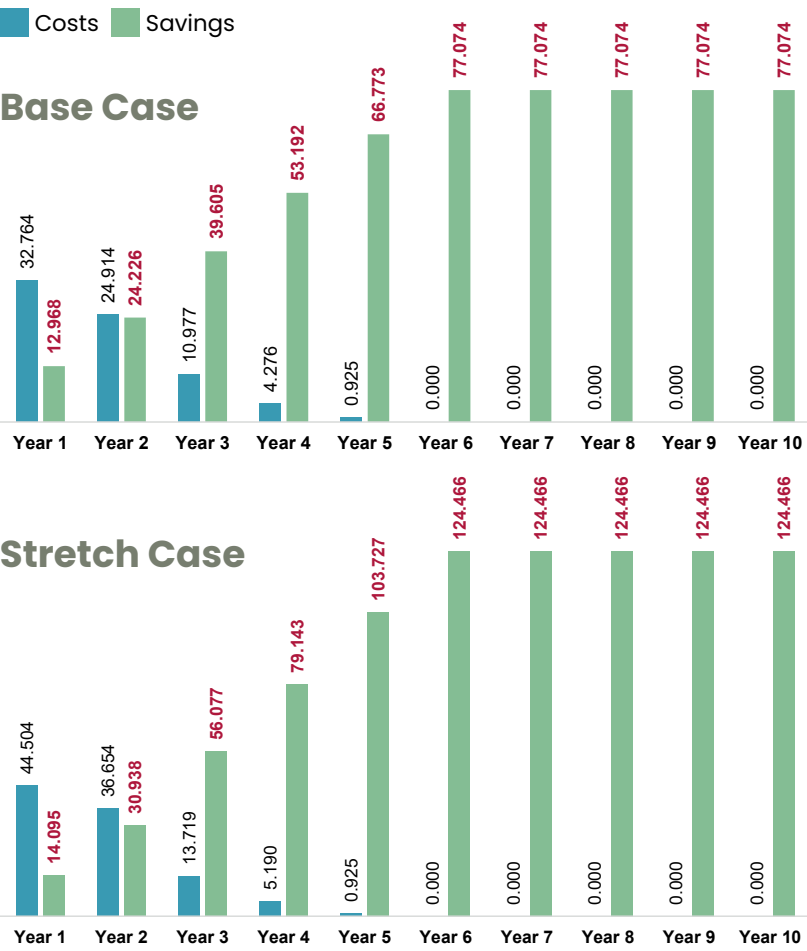
Breakeven analysis and 10-year financial outlook

This subsection provides a breakeven analysis, assessing when cumulative savings from reorganisation outweigh the one-off implementation costs. It also presents a 10-year outlook of the net financial benefit. This forward-looking view demonstrates the feasibility and long-term value of the option.

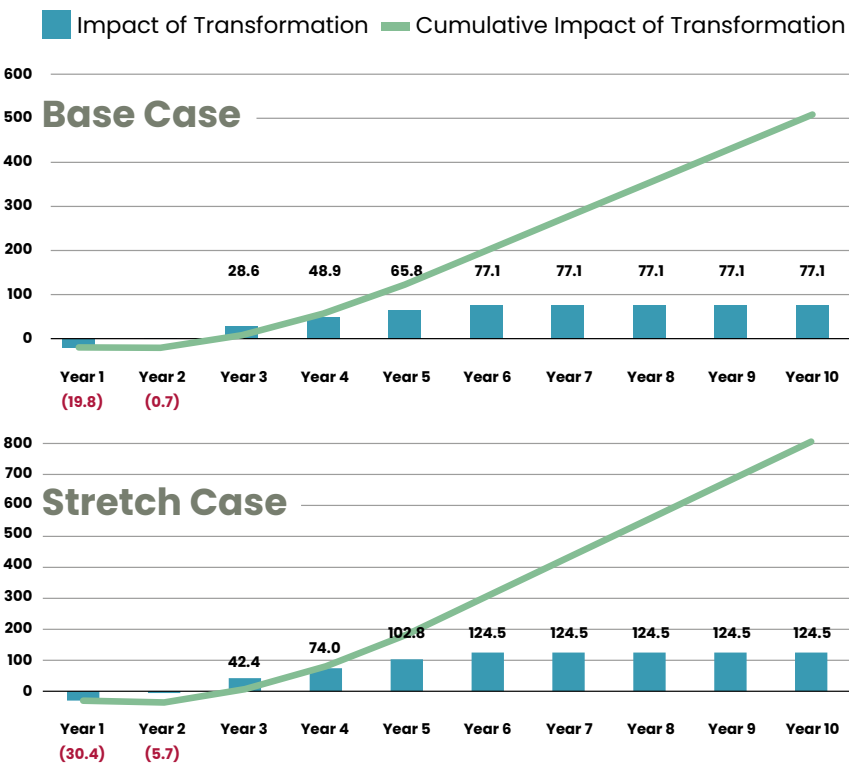
The financial analysis indicates that **breakeven is achieved in 2 year and 9 months in the base scenario (2 year and 11 months in stretched scenario)**, after which cumulative net savings exceed implementation costs. By Year 6, the reorganisation delivers a total net financial benefit of £77.1 million in the base scenario (£124.5 million in Stretch scenario), supporting stronger long-term resilience. These benefits position the new authorities to contribute to future budget gaps and reinvest in public services. After the breakeven point, in the base case, **the expected net benefit for the three proposed unitary authorities collectively would be £508.3 million by year 10 compared to £805.3 million in the stretched case.** These ongoing benefits gives the new authorities a sound financial basis to move forwards with renewed focus and investment in local public services.

The graphs opposite illustrate the payback trajectory over time, highlighting the breakeven year with the cumulative impact of transformation (estimated savings offset by costs of implementation) as a line plotted against the net impact of transformation for that year.

Implementation Costs vs Gross Annual Savings (£’m)



Breakeven Point - Cumulative Net Savings vs Costs (£’m)



Costs incurred by a shadow authority prior to Year 1 of a new authority form part of the existing cost envelope. These costs would be brought forward in the implementation planning phase, and funding would need to be identified and agreed collectively by the existing authorities working in their shadow authority roles.

The summary tables include yearly savings, costs, and annual net benefit.

Base Case

Base Case	Year 1 (£'m)	Year 2 (£'m)	Year 3 (£'m)	Year 4 (£'m)	Year 5 (£'m)	Year 6 (£'m)	Year 7 (£'m)	Year 8 (£'m)	Year 9 (£'m)	Year 10 (£'m)
Savings										
Reorganisation and Transformation Savings	13.0	24.2	39.6	53.2	66.8	77.1	77.1	77.1	77.1	77.1
Costs										
Implementation Costs	(32.8)	(24.9)	(11.0)	(4.3)	(0.9)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Impact of Transformation	(19.8)	(0.7)	28.6	48.9	65.9	77.1	77.1	77.1	77.1	77.1

Stretch Case

Stretch Case	Year 1 (£'m)	Year 2 (£'m)	Year 3 (£'m)	Year 4 (£'m)	Year 5 (£'m)	Year 6 (£'m)	Year 7 (£'m)	Year 8 (£'m)	Year 9 (£'m)	Year 10 (£'m)
Savings										
Reorganisation and Transformation Savings	14.1	30.9	56.1	79.1	103.7	124.5	124.5	124.5	124.5	124.5
Costs										
Implementation Costs	(44.5)	(36.7)	(13.7)	(5.2)	(0.9)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Impact of Transformation	(30.4)	(5.8)	42.4	73.9	102.8	124.5	124.5	124.5	124.5	124.5

Further details on the financial analysis presented in this section are included in **Appendix 2**.

Council Tax

Separate analysis has been completed on Council Tax and the findings indicate that the existing authorities could harmonise to a weighted average rate of Council Tax based on 2025/26 approved rates within two years. However, the financial impact of harmonising Council Tax has not been included in the financial modelling for this case. This is due to the fact that the future shadow authorities are best placed to consider the most appropriate options for harmonisation, while balancing the interests of residents against the medium-term financial strategy for the new unitary authorities.

District Council offices

Decisions will be required to be made by the two new unitaries in the North and the South regarding the current estates and the working locations to be retained. It is envisaged that many (if not, all) of the current District offices will likely continue in a different form under the new unitary authorities.

Regional Budget gaps

As at 2025/26, the region is projecting a budget gap of £163.6m between 2026/27 to 2028/29 and increasing by a further £39.3m in 2029/30.

This estimate excludes any implications from Council Tax Harmonisation (see above), Business Rates Reset and the outcome of the Fair Funding Review which will be confirmed as part of the final 2026/27 Local Government Finance Settlement.

Beyond 2026/27, revised estimates on medium-term financial plans and future budget gaps will be for shadow authorities to determine based on updated information and final decisions from the Government such as for the Fair Funding Review.

CASE STUDY

Teignbridge Council's Modern 25 Programme

Teignbridge Council is transforming its operating model to deliver a modern, efficient, and people-focused authority — closing a £3.8 million budget gap while creating lasting value for residents, staff, and partners.

Why This Matters

- **Financial Sustainability:** By aligning budgets with strategic priorities and benchmarking services, the Council is ensuring every pound delivers maximum impact—protecting key services and securing long-term financial resilience.
- **Digital Innovation:** Shifting to a digitally enabled council means faster, easier access to services for residents and smarter tools for staff. Moving infrastructure to Azure and adopting Microsoft 365 empowers employees as “citizen developers,” driving innovation from within.
- **Person-Centred Design:** Services are being redesigned around the needs of residents, reducing duplication and improving the customer experience.
- **Efficiency & Effectiveness:** Streamlined processes and smarter resource allocation mean services are delivered better, faster, and at lower cost—for example we have improved street cleansing service that saves on vehicles and expenses.
- **Value for Money:** Benchmarking service costs to identify areas of high costs and investigating opportunities for savings.
- **Investing in Staff:** A new People Strategy and organisational review create clear career pathways, fair pay, and a culture where staff feel valued and supported.



How We're Delivering Change

- **People & Organisation:** Modernising job titles, pay structures, job roles and developing training and development opportunities to build a high-performing, motivated workforce.
- **Strategic Portfolio:** 52 projects across all services—maximizing income, cutting costs, and transferring assets to local communities for greater impact.
- **Digital Transformation:** New digital processes and customer-facing solutions, including customer feedback and redesign of website content and booking systems, making it easier for residents to self-serve and for staff to work efficiently. Developing a clear data strategy and using digital tools to improve the quality of our data and drive evidence led data decision making.
- **Process redesign:** Reviewing and codesigning our processes with customers and shortening the end-to-end times to improve customer satisfaction.

To date the programme has delivered just under £900k of revenue savings and £700k one off savings (29% of the overall financial targets).



Exmoor, North Devon

Section 6: Implementation and roadmap

Devon's implementation of the 4-5-1 local government reorganisation model is a unique opportunity to create modern, resilient, and community-centred authorities, building on a strong track record of service delivery, drawing on regional best practice, and guided by lessons from comparable transformations, to ensure a smooth, unified transition that improves service quality, outcomes and puts local needs at the heart of change.

Our approach to implementation is rooted in Devon's unique context, scale, diversity, and strong sense of place, while drawing on the lessons and successes of comparable reorganisations elsewhere. Central to this approach is our commitment to improving outcomes for our communities, ensuring that the services and support we provide are responsive to local needs and aspirations.

Crucially, as we reshape local government, we recognise the realities of working across boundaries, whether geographic, organisational, or sectoral, and the importance of collective solutions to shared challenges. Our philosophy of Reimagining Devon is fundamentally grounded in collaboration: we are committed to working constructively across traditional borders to address issues that do not stop at administrative lines. This means actively seeking ways to co-design and co-deliver services in partnership with neighbouring authorities, health partners, and other key stakeholders. Looking ahead, we will proactively explore opportunities to develop system-level solutions on a Devon-wide basis. This includes harnessing the strengths and expertise found across our county to tackle complex issues, such as health inequalities, economic growth, and environmental sustainability, which require a coordinated response. At the same time, we are committed to establishing local government structures that are sustainable and fit for the future, capable of adapting to emerging challenges and harnessing the opportunities outlined earlier in our proposal. This section sets out our plan for effective transition to Devon's unitary authorities under our 4-5-1 proposal, ensuring continuity for residents and staff, and laying the foundations for long-term transformation.

Bridestowe, West Devon

Track record of delivering upper-tier services

Our experience is further enhanced by the successful operation of existing unitaries in Plymouth and Torbay, and by the collaborative arrangements already in place across the county (outlined previously in existing partnership working). Notably, Torbay's significant improvements in children's services, evidenced by recent positive Ofsted inspections, demonstrate the capacity within the county to drive service transformation and deliver improved outcomes for children and families. This track record provides a robust foundation for transition, ensuring that the new authorities will inherit not only the statutory responsibilities but also the expertise, systems, and partnerships necessary to deliver high-quality services from day one.

This is particularly important and directly applicable to our 4-5-1 model, as it demonstrates how the expansion of Torbay's good practice, especially in areas like children's services, can inform and strengthen the approach across a larger unitary footprint. As we look ahead to the implementation phase, we recognise the importance of robust change management and clear communication to support both our workforce and communities throughout this period of transformation. We are committed to open dialogue, providing regular updates and comprehensive guidance to staff, residents, and partners to minimise uncertainty and build confidence in the new arrangements. This will include a carefully planned programme of engagement activities designed to listen to concerns, answer questions, and ensure that all voices are heard as the new structures take shape.

Delivering the transition as a unified, Devon-wide programme is critical to maintaining the integrity and quality of key upper-tier services. Our aim is to ensure that these vital services, such as adult social care, children's services, and public health, are reshaped to align with the new unitary structure and those receiving the service, rather than fragmented. This is especially relevant given our current arrangements, where we already operate with, for example, three directors of adult services

and three directors of children's services, with three established social care systems across the county council, Plymouth and Torbay. By coordinating the reshuffle of these services at a Devon-wide level, we can ensure that best practice is shared, resources are used efficiently, and the high standards delivered in areas like Torbay are embedded consistently across all new authorities.

This approach also helps safeguard continuity of care and support for residents, as service users experience minimal disruption and benefit from a seamless transition. A Devon-wide programme structure provides the necessary oversight and governance to align strategic priorities, avoid duplication, and manage risks collectively, supporting a coherent and resilient system for the future.

The design of our 4-5-1 model recognises Devon's distinct communities, each with its own identity, priorities, and needs. By structuring the new authorities to reflect these local characteristics, we ensure that governance remains close to the communities it serves. Our approach is further strengthened by our well-established relationships with neighbouring authorities and key partners, which have long underpinned the delivery of essential services across boundaries. These collaborative foundations mean that, as we transition to the 4-5-1, there is already a shared commitment and practical experience in joint working, ensuring that the transfer of responsibilities will be smooth and coordinated.



Learnings from previous LGR implementations

We have been eager to understand lessons learned from other areas who have experienced delivering LGR programmes, including Cumbria, who have demonstrated the importance of early mobilisation, clear governance, and a relentless focus on service continuity. The Cumbria LGR programme was delivered on time, within budget, and with a strong focus on safe and legal Day 1 delivery, while laying the groundwork for future transformation. Key learnings from Cumbria include:

- **Early mobilisation and embracing change:** Initiate the process promptly, encourage openness to change across the organisation, and remain flexible in the face of uncertainty to ensure effective risk management and uninterrupted service delivery.
- **Detailed upfront planning:** Thorough upfront planning and an early focus on key enabler services such as ICT, HR, and Customer and Digital services are essential for a smooth and efficient transformation process.
- **Strong governance and programme management:** Effective programme delivery in Cumbria was ensured by establishing comprehensive governance structures and a dedicated programme management office, providing clear oversight, accountability, and rigorous project management.
- **Early appointment of leadership:** Appointing chief officers and establishing shadow unitary boards early ensured strong leadership and effective preparation for Day 1 operations.
- **Prioritise communications and engagement:** Effective communication and early engagement with staff, partners, and elected members are crucial for building trust, ensuring buy-in, and maintaining political alignment throughout the transformation process.
- **Collaboration and accountability:** Success in the Cumbria programme was achieved through strong cross-organisational collaboration and ongoing monitoring to ensure timely progress and accountability.
- **Clarity on service models and separation:** To ensure a smooth transition, all efforts should be made to separate services before Day 1 and clarify future arrangements for specialist services through early engagement with relevant government departments.
- **Delivering safe and legal Day 1:** By focusing solely on essential Day 1 requirements, Cumbria successfully delivered safe and legal operations for the new councils and fire service, achieving nearly all planned milestones.
- **Resource and budget management:** Cumbria ensured budget control by establishing a shared implementation reserve and focused on safe Day 1 delivery, while also planning for ongoing transformation and future efficiencies.



Continuing to engage with our key stakeholders

Engagement is at the heart of our approach. Throughout the development of this proposal, we have worked closely with residents, staff, partners, and stakeholders across Devon. We have proactively incorporated resident expectations into our LGR implementation programme assumptions, putting the customer at the heart of the design. This includes integrating local representation and accountability within our governance framework, promoting transparency and responsiveness in planning and execution, safeguarding community identity and environmental assets, and establishing effective mechanisms for meaningful resident engagement during the transition and thereafter.

This engagement will continue and intensify through implementation, with regular communications, opportunities for feedback, and co-design of key elements of the new authorities. We recognise that the success of LGR depends on the confidence and participation of those it affects most, and we are committed to maintaining open, honest, and inclusive dialogue at every stage. Our key stakeholders include citizens and communities of Devon, MHCLG, MPs, staff, businesses, town and parish councils, VCSEs, national parks, health, police, fire service and other external service providers.

Our key principles for reorganisation

Our implementation is guided by a set of clear principles, shaped by local priorities and national best practice:

- **Continuity of public services:** Residents must experience no disruption to essential services.
- **Community and resident-focused design:** Services and structures will be shaped around the needs and aspirations of Devon’s communities.
- **Accountable decision making:** Decision-making will be open, visible, and subject to robust scrutiny.
- **Collaboration and partnership:** We will build on Devon’s success of partnership working, both within local government and with the NHS, police, voluntary sector, and business.
- **Financial sustainability:** Every decision will be underpinned by a commitment to value for money and long-term resilience.

- **Risk management and governance:** Risks will be identified early and managed robustly, with clear escalation routes and contingency plans.
- **Early mobilisation:** Preparation will begin immediately, ensuring readiness and accelerating delivery.
- **Embedding a transformation culture:** Our focus will be on delivering truly transformed services that deliver the best outcomes for residents. Alongside Plymouth, we will create two new authorities, to ensure that each new council will be free from any legacy ‘continuing authority’ status. This will allow them to break with the past, to embrace and embed transformation and cultural change from the start – unlocking the agility and responsiveness that our communities deserve.

Implementation activities

Our implementation plan is structured around a series of coordinated activities, each designed to ensure a safe, legal, and effective transition. To translate these principles into effective action, our approach is structured around five clear phases of implementation. While the scale and complexity of these phases are significant, we are well equipped with the experience, knowledge, and collaborative approach required for success. Each phase

is underpinned by a clear focus on service improvement and safeguarding financial sustainability, ensuring that Devon’s residents benefit not only from a smooth transition but also from enhanced, resilient services for years to come.

Our approach aligns with the timelines set out by MHCLG in their summary of the local government reorganisation process outlined below:

MHCLG milestone	Timeline	Description
Submission of final proposals	November 2025	Formal submission of the proposed model for local government reorganisation in Devon to MHCLG.
Statutory consultation	January 2026 – May 2026	The government conducts a statutory consultation, inviting views from affected councils, statutory consultees, and the public.
Decision to implement a proposal	June/July 2026	Ministers announce which, if any, proposals will be implemented, with or without modification.
Preparation of secondary legislation (Structural Changes Order, SCO)	Drafting & Laying: September / October 2026 Parliamentary Approval: Autumn 2026	The Department works with councils to draft the SCO, which is then laid before Parliament for approval.
Making of the SCO	Autumn 2026	The SCO is made, specifying the arrangements for the new unitary authorities, including elections, transition governance, and abolition of all predecessor councils.
Elections to the new unitary authorities	May 2027	Elections are held for the new unitary councils, using arrangements specified in the SCO.
Transition period	Autumn 2026 – March 2028	Existing councils continue service delivery and prepare for transition, working with the new shadow authorities and transition bodies.
Vesting day	April 2028	The new unitary authorities assume all legal duties and powers, predecessor councils are abolished, and the new governance structure is fully operational.

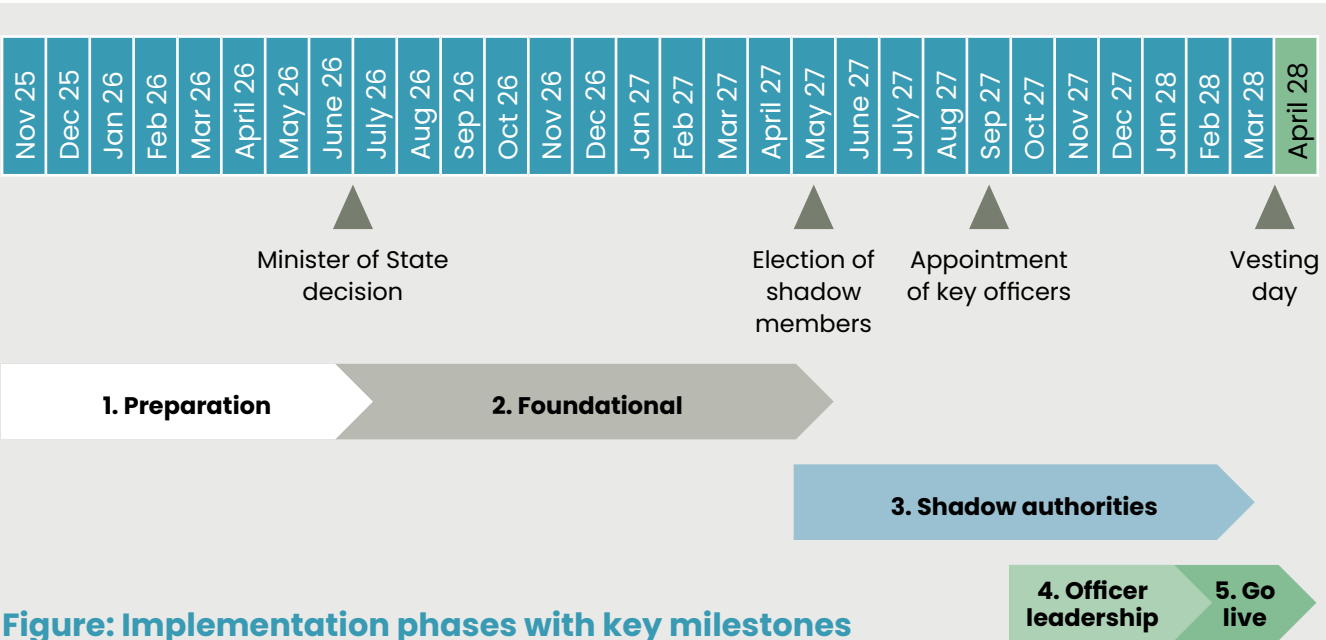


Figure: Implementation phases with key milestones

Phases of implementation and key activities

Below, we outline the key activities required for each of our proposed implementation phase, to further support the timeline set out by MHCLG above.

Phase	Timeline	Key activities
Preparation	November 2025 – June / July 2026	- Establish governance structures, workstreams, and financial controls with clearly defined responsibilities and reporting lines. Form joint committees to oversee transitional arrangements with equal representation from each council. - Develop a comprehensive implementation plan and timeline, appointing a project manager to ensure delivery of key milestones along the critical path. - Confirm future service requirements and undertake detailed service planning for the new unitary authorities. - Define and agree the scope of decisions related to local government reorganisation (LGR) with existing councils. - Complete a baseline review of data across councils, identify key differences, and plan for merging data repositories. - Agree on a communications and engagement strategy for stakeholders and the public. - Respond to government decisions and expand the programme in alignment with partners.

Phase	Timeline	Key activities
Foundational	June – July 2026 – May 2027	- Advance activities within the programme’s defined scope, such as ICT infrastructure, systems integration, and contract management, ensuring a consistent approach across all new councils. - Align and transform services by reconfiguring existing area-based working arrangements to reflect the boundaries of the new authorities. - Conduct comprehensive options appraisals for key service areas. - Prepare for critical decision-making points throughout the programme’s lifecycle. - Organise and implement the necessary arrangements for elections. - Ensure full compliance with the Structural Changes Order, undertaking legal checks and providing assurance as required.
Shadow authorities	May 2027 – March 2028	- Appoint chief executives, statutory officers, and other essential leadership roles, ensuring a transparent and robust recruitment process that upholds legal and governance requirements. - Deliver comprehensive member induction programmes and targeted service briefings to equip elected representatives with the necessary knowledge and skills for their roles within the new authorities.
Officer leadership	October 2027 – March 2028	- Appoint Tier 2 and Tier 3 leadership, ensuring a transparent, robust recruitment process in line with statutory and governance requirements. - Lead comprehensive service planning activities to align operations with the new authority structure. - Develop and review the Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to establish clear direction and financial sustainability. - Formulate and approve key policies and strategies, including strategic priorities, corporate plans, the unitary strategic risk register, and the constitution. - Design the operating model and allocate staffing resources to support effective service delivery. - Undertake all necessary preparations to ensure organisational readiness for Day 1 operations.
Go live	April 2028	- Maintain service stability and continuity from Day 1, ensuring seamless operations for all stakeholders. - Regularly monitor and proactively manage early operational performance to address emerging issues swiftly. - Initiate the delivery of post-LGR transformation priorities, supporting the new authority’s objectives. - Embed new governance, organisational culture, and leadership arrangements to underpin effective service delivery.

Ambitions for Day 1

Our overriding ambition for Day 1 is to ensure that residents, staff, and partners experience a seamless transition, with no disruption to essential services. Our unitary authorities will be safe, legal, and effective from the outset, with clear leadership, robust systems, and a shared commitment to improvement.

Beyond Day 1, we will accelerate transformation, integrating services, investing in digital, and embedding a culture of continuous improvement, so that Devon’s new councils are not only fit for today, but ready for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

To ensure a smooth Day 1 transition, we will set a clear vision and strategy, standardise data structures, and keep staff informed with regular updates and training. We will also map skills and address gaps, review contracts for integration opportunities, and establish solid financial and commercial frameworks for an efficient transfer of responsibilities. Beyond the minimum Day 1 requirements to ensure safe and legal may include some targeted transformation activities, including bringing service leads together to baseline and identify opportunities to align and appointing teams to start delivering as part of the unitary delivery groups. Meanwhile, further transformation planning could be undertaken to outline the journey across the implementation period.

As part of a stretch target for post-Day 1 activity, full integration activities may focus on establishing a single data platform to serve as the definitive repository for all information across the new unitary authorities. This approach would enable the development of a single, integrated set of indicators, with automated reporting to support evidence-based decision-making and promote transparency. By unifying data sources and streamlining reporting processes, our councils would be able to monitor service delivery, identify areas for improvement, and adapt swiftly to emerging needs. Such systems thinking would also facilitate cross-functional collaboration, allowing teams to share insights and best practices, ultimately driving more effective and responsive public services throughout Devon.

Governance

A robust governance framework will oversee the transition, ensuring clear accountability, effective decision-making, and strong programme management.

The LGR Programme Board, led by chief executives and a programme director, will provide strategic oversight and manage risks. Unitary delivery groups will focus on area-specific issues, while Shadow Authority Boards will prepare each new council for go-live. A Day 1 Board will ensure operational readiness, and dedicated workstreams will address the core operational and strategic areas required for safe and legal delivery. More on the roles of each of the elements of our governance framework are outlined opposite.

LGR programme board:

- Reports to the leaders’ group
- Led by the chief executives of the new unitary authorities and a programme director
- Manages strategic issues and risks throughout the transition

Unitary delivery groups:

- Operate as sub-groups under the Programme Board
- Focus on area-specific matters such as elections, planning, and policy
- Gain importance as shadow authorities are formed and interim heads of paid service are appointed

Shadow authority boards:

- Established for each new unitary authority
- Led by the appointed chief executive
- Responsible for reviewing and executing strategies ahead of full implementation

District area representatives:

- Representatives from the new clustered councils
- Provide local insight to ensure area-specific impacts are considered in planning and delivery

Day 1 board:

- Oversees preparations for the go-live date
- Ensures delivery of the programme plan, tracks milestones, and completion of Day 1 activities

A number of key workstreams have been initially identified to support the successful transition, to tackle both safe and legal Day 1 delivery, to providing a secure foundation to achieve future transformation ambitions.

Workstream	Activity
Programme Management	Provides strategic oversight of the LGR programme, ensuring achievement of key milestones, effective risk management, and optimal allocation of resources.
Governance and Legal	Sets up compliant governance, supports elections, ensures legal readiness, and manages constitutional and statutory requirements for new authorities.
Finance	Oversees budget allocation, transition funding, long-term planning, and financial sustainability during the transition.
Workforce	Manages staff transfers (e.g., TUPE), consults with staff, and develops workforce strategies to support recruitment, retention, and organisational design.
Culture and Change	Implements cultural change, promotes staff engagement, and co-develops inclusive values and branding for a positive workplace culture.
Digital and Data	Maps ICT systems, cleans and migrates data, and builds secure digital platforms for integrated services.
Contracts, Commercial, Assets and Estates	Coordinates procurement pipelines, tracks contracts, oversees assets and estates, and maintains commercial arrangements for continuity and cost-effectiveness.
Communications and Engagement	Manages communications with staff, residents, and stakeholders to keep the transition transparent.

Risks and mitigations

We recognise the scale and complexity of LGR in Devon and have identified key risks, which we have already started work on to effectively manage and mitigate through our programme approach. These risks will be managed through a programme-wide risk register, with mitigations embedded in governance and delivery plans.

Managing the realignment process requires comprehensive early planning, drawing on the experiences of existing unitary authorities and incorporating lessons learned from established best practice. To ensure seamless integration of ICT and systems, a dedicated workstream will be established, beginning with thorough

system mapping and culminating in a clearly defined integration plan. Addressing potential capacity constraints involves adopting flexible resourcing arrangements, seeking external expertise where necessary, and systematically mapping the skills available within the organisation. The risk of the programme slipping behind schedule will be mitigated by maintaining robust governance structures, monitoring progress against key milestones, and having clear escalation routes in place for any emerging issues.

To prevent cultural misalignment, staff will be engaged from the outset, underpinned by well-articulated design principles and visible leadership to maintain alignment and motivation. When it comes to council tax harmonisation, clear and transparent

communication will be prioritised, making good use of government frameworks and providing residents with straightforward justifications for any changes. The aggregation of services will be managed through early alignment of plans, subjecting proposals to rigorous testing, and ensuring robust transition arrangements are in place. Finally, uncertainties around financial matters will be addressed by appointing a dedicated financial oversight group, aligning with recovery strategies, and ensuring early visibility of financial pressures and solutions.

As we move further into implementation planning, we will be taking a proactive approach to updating and tracking risks. We are also conscious of the additional benefits that can be unlocked through our 4-5-1 model that have yet to be outlined or materialise. This will also be captured as part of our comprehensive approach to programme governance.

Implementation and beyond

Implementation is not the end of the journey, but the beginning. Post-LGR, each authority will continue to develop and align new operating models, integrate contracts, further improve services, and invest in digital transformation and workforce development. We are committed to a culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and partnership, ensuring that Devon’s new councils are not only fit for today, but ready for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Appendix 1: 4-5-1+

Introduction

The creation of a new unitary authority across the proposed boundaries is a complex change that needs careful consideration; for the purposes of Devon this boundary change option presents the opportunity for Plymouth to be able to deliver services on the city and hinterland footprint which aligns with the Plymouth Policy Area (PPA).

This area of 'urban fringe' is identified in the Joint Local Plan as providing housing numbers designed to meet the city's needs and is quite distinctive in character to the rural parts of the district which adjoin it. Appropriately these adjoining areas are covered by a separate set of planning policies reflecting the different characteristics and needs of those towns, villages and rural communities. The reason for this alignment and not a further expansion is aligned to three key factors:

- Limiting the expansion so that it does not cross the Dartmoor National Park boundary brings significant benefits, mainly by maintaining clarity and coherence in planning authority responsibilities. By respecting the existing national park boundaries, the proposal avoids the administrative and operational complexities that would arise from having the National Park responsible for planning policy and planning decisions affecting two separate unitary councils one with a wholly urban focus the other including large areas which are principally rural in their character. This approach ensures that the distinctive environmental, historic, and cultural considerations of the National Park remain within the curtilage of a single, dedicated unitary authority, thereby safeguarding

the park's unique qualities. It also prevents duplication of effort, reduces the potential for conflicting policies, and provides clear lines of accountability for residents and stakeholders. This approach reflects the identity of place by creating a revised boundary that reflects the practical realities of the urban/rural boundary, respecting the views of local communities who live beyond the 'urban fringe' who do not see themselves as part of the city.

- The 4-5-1+ proposal has been carefully put forward to ensure that Plymouth's expansion into the neighbouring areas of South Hams is balanced and proportionate, thereby safeguarding the growth potential and opportunities for the future Northern and Southern Devon unitary authorities. By limiting the extension to only those areas which naturally align with Plymouth's existing economic and community footprint, the proposal avoids undermining the viability or competitiveness of the adjoining unitaries. This measured approach ensures that each new authority retains sufficient scale, resources and strategic assets to pursue ambitious development and regeneration agendas, supporting balanced regional growth rather than concentrating advantage in one part of Devon to the detriment of others.

Dartmoor



■ The greater balance in population achieved through the 4-5-1+ proposal is expected to enhance both devolution opportunities and the collective voice of the new unitary authorities. By ensuring a more even distribution of key metrics such as council tax income and GVA per capita, each authority is better positioned to advocate for its local priorities and secure equitable funding and powers from central government. This balance not only strengthens the financial resilience of each unitary but also creates more effective representation at regional and national levels, ensuring that diverse community needs are addressed and that no single authority dominates the conversation, allowing for greater inclusivity and responsiveness, driving innovation and sustainable growth across the region.

If the Secretary of State was minded to use the LGR process as a tool for further ‘tidying up’ of local administrative boundaries, a minor modification at the northern edge of the National Park would ensure that Dartmoor NP authority was wholly contained within one new council area. This amendment would see the border line between the Northern and Southern Devon unitary councils follow existing district boundaries but amended to follow the National Park boundary south of Cheriton Bishop – such a change would affect approximately 1km of the boundary line but would significantly increase the advantage seen by the National Park in terms of administrative simplicity. In the current system, Dartmoor NP resides within

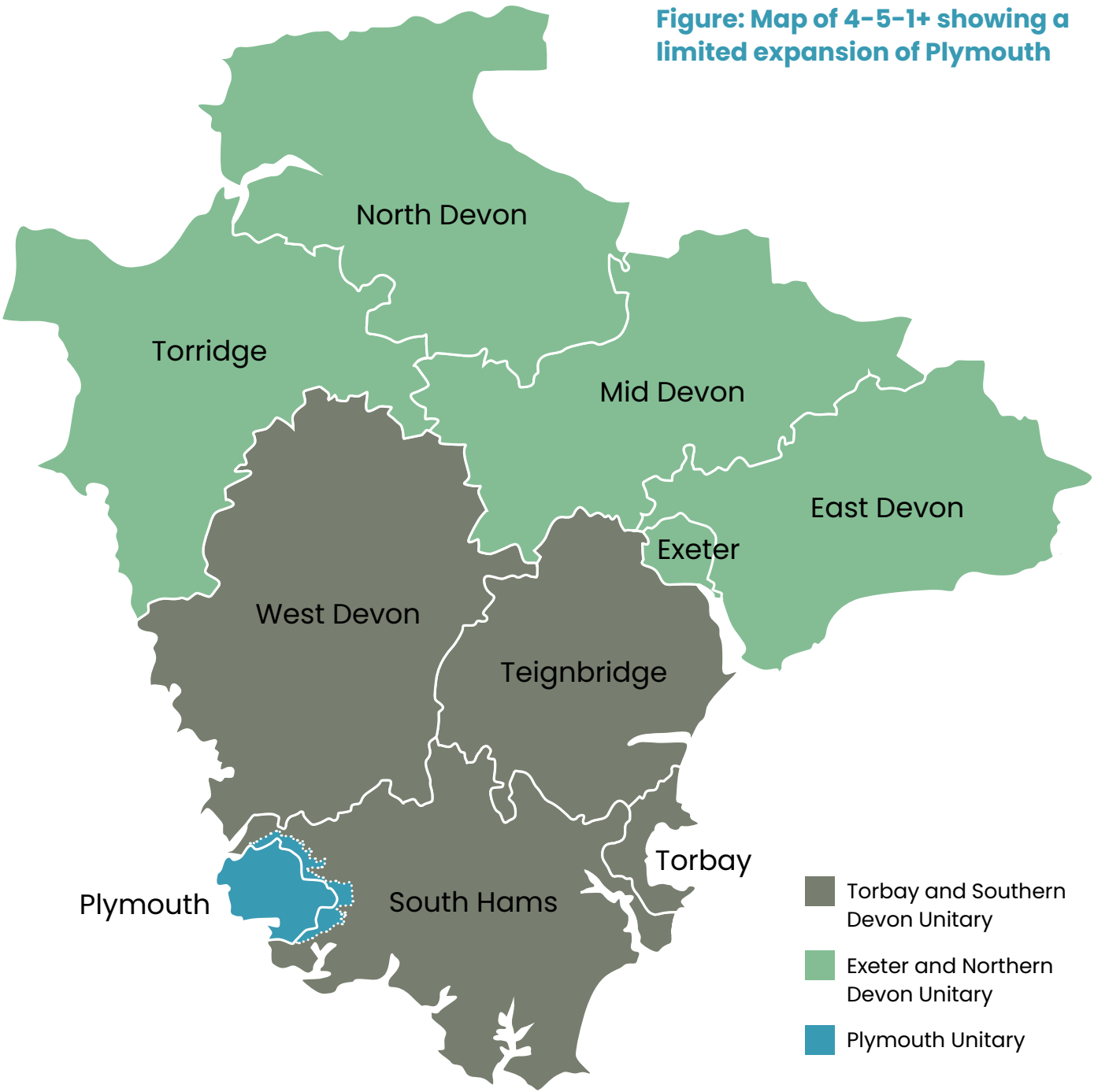
4 council areas. If the Secretary of State was to agree this minor realignment, the whole of Dartmoor would be contained within a single council area.

How is this option different?

This appendix (Option 4-5-1+) is based on our proposal for Option 4-5-1 but requests a modification based on a few select boundary changes. This submission is conditional upon this modification being approved by the Secretary of State using the modification powers under the 2007 Act as this represents the stronger case for change. In the view of the Local Authorities that support this option, these boundary changes better meet government criteria, drive economic growth, create unitary authorities that reflect and serve cohesive communities, and realise the full potential of local government reorganisation. Option 4-5-1+ uses the district building blocks of Option 4-5-1 but with some, critical boundary changes to create stronger, more balanced unitary authorities that are set up to drive economic growth across the region.

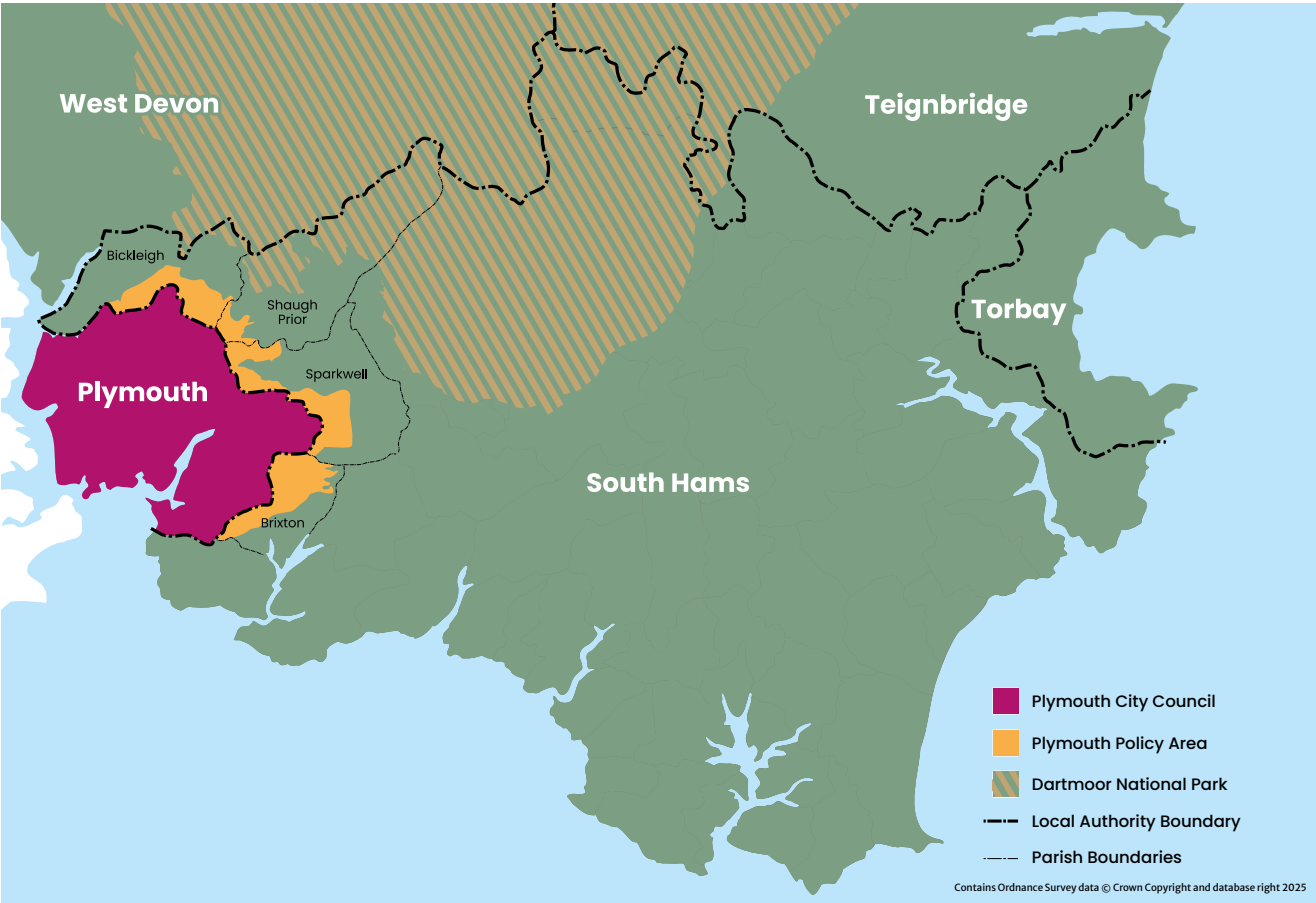
The 4-5-1+ option proposes the modest expansion of Plymouth into neighbouring South Hams (Parishes of Bickleigh, Shaugh Prior, Sparkwell and Brixton) but limited to those parts of the 4 parishes that fall within the Plymouth Policy Area as defined with the Joint Local Plan, primarily affecting areas such as Sherford and Woolwell.

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

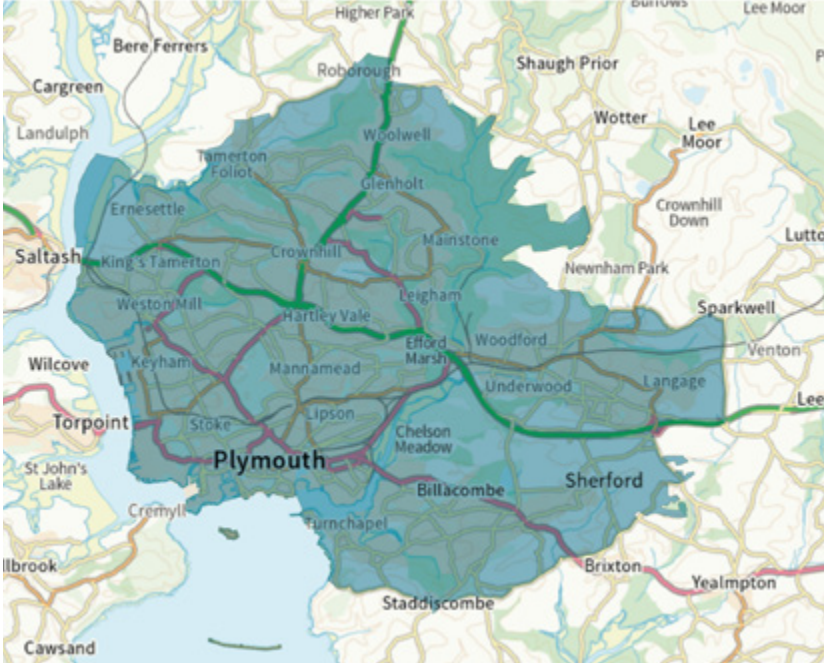


Unitary 1	Torbay and Southern Devon unitary: South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon.
Unitary 2	Exeter and Northern Devon unitary: Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge.
Unitary 3	Plymouth unitary including an expanded Plymouth area





The graphic above outlines the proposed growth areas into South Hams as part of the 4-5-1+ expansion of Plymouth. The orange areas of the map represent the “urban fringe” policy area expansion but is not inclusive of all of the parish area, ensuring that the expanded Plymouth unitary does not cross over Dartmoor National Park boundaries. It is important to acknowledge the inherent complexity involved in breaking up existing parishes, however if a boundary change is to be considered for the surrounding area of Plymouth, we believe this is the only logical way of proceeding as it is aligned to the Plymouth Policy Area (PPA), as determined by Plymouth City Council as being the natural and required extension of the Plymouth conurbation within the South Hams.



How this option meets the government criteria

4-5-1+ builds directly on the strengths of the 4-5-1 model outlined in the main proposal, offering an enhancement that further improves balance, resilience, and alignment with some government criteria. The key improvement in 4-5-1+ is the modest expansion of Plymouth’s boundaries to better reflect the city’s urban footprint and functional economic area, as defined in the Plymouth Policy Area (PPA). This adjustment is not a wholesale redrawing of boundaries, but a targeted change that addresses specific imbalances and unlocks additional benefits.

- **Greater balance across key metrics:** Our options appraisal demonstrates that 4-5-1+ achieves greater balance in financial, economic, and demographic indicators compared to 4-5-1. The expanded Plymouth area in 4-5-1+ results in a more even distribution of population, council tax base, and economic output across the three unitaries. This is evidenced by the quantitative assessment, where 4-5-1+ is consistently rated as the most balanced model for criteria such as council tax income, GVA per capita, and housing delivery. The improved balance reduces the risk of any single authority being disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged, supporting long-term financial sustainability and equitable service provision.
- **Enhanced alignment with functional geographies:** 4-5-1+ better aligns local government boundaries with the real patterns of economic activity, housing markets, and service use. By modestly expanding Plymouth’s boundaries to include its immediate hinterland, the model reflects the true extent of the city’s urban area. This alignment supports more coherent spatial planning, infrastructure investment, and service delivery, particularly in areas such as housing, transport, and economic development. It also ensures that the benefits of Plymouth’s economic growth and regeneration are more widely shared with neighbouring communities.
- **Resilience and capacity to withstand shocks:** The enhanced balance and scale achieved in 4-5-1+ mean that each unitary authority is better equipped to withstand financial shocks, manage demand-led services, and invest in transformation. The expanded Plymouth area, in particular, benefits from a broader tax base and greater economic diversity, which supports resilience in the face of fiscal pressures or economic downturns. This resilience is a core requirement of the government’s criteria for local government reorganisation and is a clear area where 4-5-1+ offers a slight improvement over 4-5-1.
- **No detriment to local accountability or service quality:** Importantly, the move from 4-5-1 to 4-5-1+ does not undermine the core strengths of the original model. Local accountability, democratic representation, and service quality are preserved and, in some areas, enhanced. The modest boundary changes are carefully designed to avoid disruption to established communities or service arrangements, ensuring continuity and stability during transition.
- **Stronger platform for devolution and strategic leadership:** 4-5-1+ provides a more balanced and credible platform for future devolution arrangements, including engagement with a Mayoral Combined Authority. The improved population and economic balance between the three unitaries ensures fairer representation and influence within regional governance structures. This is particularly important for strategic coordination on issues such as transport, skills, and housing, where balanced authorities can collaborate more effectively and advocate for their communities with a unified voice.
- **Improved community engagement and local identity:** A key strength of 4-5-1+ is its ability to maintain and even strengthen local identities while enabling more effective community engagement. This model preserves the distinctiveness of Plymouth as a major urban centre, while also ensuring that the surrounding areas retain their own identities and governance structures. The expanded boundaries allow for more integrated community engagement mechanisms, such as neighbourhood forums and area committees, which can operate at a scale that is both meaningful and manageable. This supports the government’s criteria for stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

The 4-5-1+ model offers a potential improvement on the base 4-5-1 proposal in some respects because it delivers greater balance, stronger alignment with functional geographies, enhanced community engagement, and a more resilient platform for future devolution and service delivery. These improvements are achieved without sacrificing the core strengths of the 4-5-1 model outlined in the main case – local identity, accountability, and high-quality services. The evidence from the options appraisal demonstrates that 4-5-1+ is the most balanced model for Devon and is therefore a strong option for local government reorganisation.

Appendix 2: Financial technical appendices

This section provides the comprehensive technical evidence base that underpins the financial analysis presented in earlier sections of the proposal. It consolidates all supporting data, calculations, and assumptions used in constructing the financial model for the assessed local government reorganisation options, ensuring that the analysis is both transparent and auditable.

The content here has been developed in close collaboration with finance teams from each existing council, reflecting shared understanding of local data and a jointly agreed methodology.

The purpose of this section is to serve as the detailed reference layer that supports the narrative and conclusions reached in the main body of this document. Each annex clearly documents its source data, allocation approach, assumptions, and any material judgement applied in the modelling process. This ensures a clear audit trail from base data through to headline findings.

To support clarity and usability, the section is structured into the following technical annexes, each aligned with a core element of the financial analysis:

Annex	Title	Description
A	Methodology and Assumption Log	Discusses the overall approach to modelling, data sources, wider assumptions, and the engagement steps taken to validate inputs with local finance leads.
B	Savings Assumptions	Sets out the savings estimates in full, including baseline costs, percentage reductions, and rationale by category, as well as the modelling behind the base and high scenarios
C	Implementation Cost Breakdown	Breaks down one-off transition and any increased costs by year and type, with cost drivers and any contingency assumptions clearly noted.

Each annex is structured for ease of navigation and aligned to the relevant sections of the main report. Where appropriate, annexes are supplemented with footnotes, citations, and version tracking to ensure reproducibility and clarity for external reviewers, auditors, and government stakeholders.

This section acts as the technical foundation upon which the financial case is built. It allows readers, particularly finance professionals, Section 151 Officers, and programme sponsors, to interrogate the detail behind each modelling decision and to have confidence in the robustness, transparency, and evidential basis of the conclusions drawn.

Annex A – methodology and assumption log

The phased model has been prepared in three sections – assumptions, calculations and outputs.

The outputs include the calculation of payback period, individual year impact of LGR and a cumulative impact of LGR. These outputs help in assessing the viability of the LGR options being assessed.

The model is based on the following key assumptions:

- 1. Savings costs
- 2. One-off implementation costs

The phased model projects the above across ten years, including three pre-implementation years (Base Year, Year -1 and Shadow Year) and seven post-implementation years.

The model is, however, based on 2025/26 prices and does not include any adjustment for future inflation for both costs as well as savings. The phased model also does not include the impact of any Council Tax Harmonisation due to uncertainty of implementation.

The inputs as well as outputs have been prepared and validated with Section 151 officers. These reflect the best estimates as of the writing of this case.

Annex B – savings assumptions

The overall savings assumptions have been prepared using a mix of top down and bottom-up savings approaches, as outlined below.

Top-down approach:

The overall savings assumptions for the current reorganisation have been calculated based on the outlined savings of unitary authorities as outlined within previous local government reorganisation documentation. These included 14 previous cases for change across England ranging from cases submitted between 2009 and 2023. The data included Low Case and High case savings.

For each individual previous case, an average savings per population base was calculated for a Base and High case savings, with the average of these reflecting the Base case savings. These were subsequently indexed up from the relevant transition year (per the previous case for change) to April 2025 prices. A simple arithmetic average of indexed savings per population base informed the overall average indexed saving per population, which was used to calculate the total ‘top-down’ savings.

The savings were reduced by 7.5% to recognise that multi-unitary scenarios are likely to achieve lower savings, following independent analysis into multi-unitary cases. This also recognises and accounts for optimism bias in savings delivery.

The top-down savings were split into underlying savings categories (as reflected in table below) using a percentage allocation mix based on internal discussions and experience.

Saving Name	Description	Rationale and Assumptions	% of Total Savings
Optimising Leadership	Reviewing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication and enhance operational efficiency, by merging similar responsibilities into fewer and more impactful positions.	Assumes a single senior leadership team for each new unitary replaces multiple councils’ executives (Chief Execs, Directors, Section 151s, Monitoring Officers). Assumes no significant delays from legal/TUPE or governance negotiations.	4%
Right Sizing the Organisation	Determining the right size of the organisation, proportionate to the services that are being delivered, offset by the costs of new technology and upskilling individuals. Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation.	Assumes c. 4% of workforce (primarily back-office/ admin roles) reduced through consolidation, automation and voluntary redundancy. Realisation depends on culture change, system integration and union engagement.	11%
Consolidating Corporate Services	Consolidating back-office functions, such as Human Resources (HR), Finance and Information Technology (IT) to streamline operations, enhance efficiencies and unlock savings.	Merger of finance, HR, payroll, legal and comms into centralised functions for each new unitary. Requires effective digital systems, unified policies and process harmonisation.	3%
Proportionate Democratic Services	Reviewing the costs of democratic services (elections, committee support, etc.) to be proportionate to the new authorities. Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (e.g. committees, elections).	Assumes reduction in number of councillors and associated committee and democratic support costs. Assumes new governance models implemented immediately post-reorganisation.	58%

Saving Name	Description	Rationale and Assumptions	% of Total Savings
Improved Digital & IT Systems	Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes, can lead to significant time and cost savings. Unified platforms and systems rationalisation reduce licensing, support, and admin overheads.	Streamlining systems and licenses, introducing self-service platforms, rationalising IT estate. Dependent on investment in digital infrastructure and culture shift to online services.	14%
Asset & Property Optimisation	Reviewing property portfolio to ensure alignment with the council's overall objectives and community needs.	Release of surplus office space, lease terminations, or revenue from letting/disposals. Contingent on lease terms, capital receipt strategy and local market conditions.	24%
Customer Engagement	Enhancing customer contact facilities, determining the needs of citizens in the new authorities and developing proportionate customer contact centres, where appropriate including self-service through digital channels, to improve customer engagement, satisfaction and drive operational efficiencies and cost savings.	Channel shift to digital, contact centre consolidation, and automation of transactions. Assumes digital access for residents, workforce reskilling, and strong comms.	4%

Savings by category as calculated from the top-down approach was subsequently compared with the savings calculated using the bottom-up approach.

Bottom-up approach:

To estimate the potential savings using the bottom-up approach, an overall spend against each of the savings' categories (as per above table) was identified and a corresponding high-level saving against spend (in percentage terms) was made against each of the categories.

The total savings were then aligned across the bottom-up and top-down approaches to ensure a realistic savings assumption by category. The alignment continued to assume a 7.5% saving reduction as above. The savings were then allocated to individual unitaries based on the unitary's share of total population.

No savings from LGR have been assumed to be realised in Base Year and Year -1. However, they start to ramp up in Shadow Year and build up to be fully realised per annum by Year 3. The savings have then been phased based on expected realisation as per the below table:

	Shadow Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Optimising Leadership		100%			
Right Sizing the Organisation		30%	30%	30%	10%
Centralising Corporate Services		50%	50%		
Proportionate Democratic Services					
Improved Digital & IT Systems		50%	50%		
Asset & Property Optimisation		10%	30%	60%	
Customer Engagement		20%	40%	40%	

Annex C – Implementation cost breakdown

The overall implementation cost assumptions have been prepared using a top-down approach only, based on the implementation costs as outlined within previous Case for Change documentation. These included the same previous cases for change used to inform the top-down Savings assumptions, to ensure consistency. The data included Low Case and High case implementation costs.

These were calculated as One-off implementation costs.

One-off implementation costs:

For each individual previous case, an average one-off implementation cost per population base was calculated for both the Low case and High case, with the average of the two informing the Base case. These were subsequently indexed up from the relevant transition year (per the previous case for change) to April 2025 prices. A simple arithmetic average of indexed one-off implementation cost per population base informed the overall average indexed one-off implementation per population.

The final figure was then apportioned across the cost categories underpinning the one-off implementation costs (see below table).

Category	Description	Rationale and Assumptions	% of Total Costs
Workforce – Exit	Compensation paid to employees as a result of restructuring/redundancies, including redundancy payments, pension strain, TUPE, salary harmonisation, and other contract termination fees.	Redundancy and termination costs reflect staff length of service.	45%
Workforce – Development	Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities.	Cost allowed for retraining through redeployment of workforce.	5%
Transition – Team	Implementation programme team including Legal, Contract Negotiation, Project and Programme Management, and specialist support.	A significant transition team required for each unitary authority. Includes legal, HR, project support, public consultation. Some benchmarks include change management and creation of new councils.	13%
Transition – Culture and Communications	Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities. This should inform the public, stakeholders, and employees of proposed changes and address concerns.	Cost allowed for other culture and comms change. Includes all rebranding, change, and engagement.	4%
Transition – Processes	Work required to harmonise processes and facilitate effective service transition. This includes specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition, and new policies and procedures.	Cost allowed for efforts to harmonise processes and procedures as part of the transition.	8%
Consolidation – Systems	Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration, commonality of cyber security, and training for new systems.	Costs reflect previous examples of system implementation. Some benchmarks do not include allowance for ERP and data migration, cleansing and interface development.	7%

Category	Description	Rationale and Assumptions	% of Total Costs
Consolidation – Estates and Facilities	Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases.	Some benchmarks do not include capital receipts, which can be used to fund, for example transformation or regeneration.	8%
Contingency	Additional 10% contingency to allow for prudence in estimates.	Standard across Cases to build out contingency.	10%
Total			100%

One-off implementation costs have been assumed to start ramping-up from Base Year and build up by Year 3. These have then been phased as per the below table:

	Base Year	Year –1	Shadow Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Workforce – Exit				30%	30%	40%
Workforce – Development				50%	50%	
Transition – Team				50%	50%	
Transition – Culture and Communications				50%	50%	
Transition – Processes				75%	25%	
Consolidation – Systems				50%	50%	
Consolidation – Estates and Facilities				50%	50%	
Contingency				10%		

Appendix 3: Detailed options appraisal

A robust and comprehensive options appraisal approach was developed and applied to the eight original potential options for reorganisation in Devon. The options, as presented below, represented a range of possible unitary authority amounts and configurations to create a robust analysis.

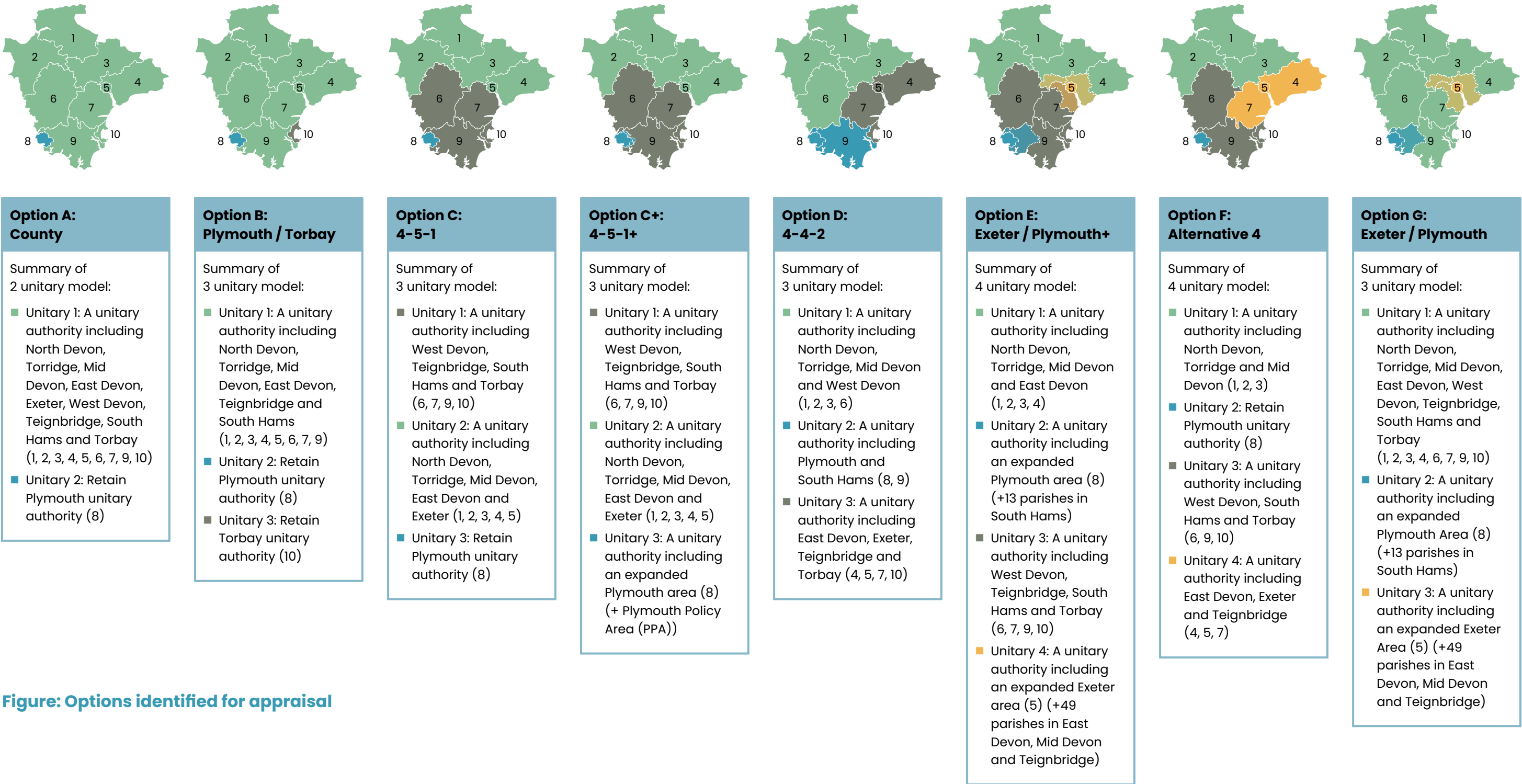


Figure: Options identified for appraisal

Our analysis approach was modelled on the six criteria laid out by the government, providing each option with six assessments based on the options ability to meet that criteria. This assessment method was used to ensure that the options were not only sensible and in local and geographic terms but would also make a successful and compelling proposal to government. The analysis was split into two approaches for Criteria 1-3 and criteria 4-6 based on the level of publicly available quantitative data.

Quantitative Assessment

For government criteria 1-3, we conducting a quantitative assessment using the most recent publicly available data sources or shared data analysis between the existing councils of Devon to evaluate each option against defined metrics, which were chosen to align with assessment factors - the key sub-elements of each criterion. The metrics and data sources used are listed below:

Figure: Metrics used for quantitative analysis of Criteria 1 – 3

Criteria 1. Establishing a single tier of local government

Guidance	Assessment Factor	Metrics
1a. Sensible economic areas with appropriate tax base	Sensible economic area	■ Gross Value Added (GVA) per Capita
	Tax base	■ Council Taxbase ■ Council Tax band D rates (average and max)
1b. Sensible geography, considering housing supply and local needs	Sensible geography	■ Geographic Area ■ Population density
	Housing supply	■ Latest Housing delivery test measurements (2023)

Criteria 2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks

Guidance	Assessment Factor	Metrics
2a. 500,000 population or rationale if not	Population size	■ Population (2023 and 2040)
2b. Managing future service costs and planning for transformation efficiencies	Potential financial efficiencies	■ Business Rates per unit population ■ Council tax income per unit population ■ Grant Funding per unit population ■ People Services Savings ■ Adult Social Care Spend per resident ■ Children’s Social Care Spend per resident
2c. Establishing firmer footing / specific arrangements	Establishing firmer financial footing	■ Non-earmarked reserves
2d & 2e. Managing existing council debt and expectational financial support (where applicable)	Council Debt	■ Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream %

Criteria 3. High quality and sustainable public services

Guidance	Assessment Factor	Metrics
3a. Improve local government and service delivery and avoid unnecessary service fragmentation	Level of service delivery	■ Deprivation score ■ 65+ Population ■ Female life expectancy ■ Unemployment rates ■ Crime rates ■ Travel time
3c. Minimise impact on crucial services including social care, children’s services, SEND and homelessness	Crucial service protection	■ Homelessness per 1,000 households ■ Rough sleeper count ■ Numbers of households in TA per 1,000 population ■ Total number of households in B&B Hotels

Figure: Data sources used for quantitative analysis

Dataset – Estimates of the population for England and Wales
Metric – Population density (2023), Population (2023), 65+ Population (2023)
■ https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales
Dataset – Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
Metric – Geographic Area (2023)
■ https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about
Dataset – Regional gross domestic product: local authorities
Metric – GVA per capita (2022)
■ https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossdomesticproductlocalauthorities
Dataset – Tables on homelessness
Metric – Homelessness Rate, Number of Households in TA per 1,000 population, Total number of households in B&B Hotels (Apr–Jun 2024)
■ https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness
Dataset – Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2023
Metric – Rough Sleeper Counts (2023)
■ https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2023/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2023

Dataset – Life expectancy for local areas of Great Britain
Metric – Female Life Expectancy (2023) https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/datasets/lifeexpectancyforlocalareasofgreatbritain?utm
Dataset – Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level
Metric – Deprivation score (2019) https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/datasets/mappingincomedeprivationatalocalauthoritylevel
Dataset – LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities
Metric – Unemployment rates (Oct 23–Sept 24) https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/li01regionallabourmarketlocalindicatorsforcountieslocalandunitaryauthorities?utm
Dataset – Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables
Metric – Crime rates (2024) https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/policeforceareadatatables
Dataset – Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement
Metric – Housing Delivery Test (2023) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-delivery-test-2023-measurement
Dataset – Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2023 to 2024 individual local authority data – outturn
Metric – Financing Costs as % NRE (2023–24) https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2023-to-2024-individual-local-authority-data-outturn
Dataset – Pixel LGR Funding Disaggregation Model
Metric – Business Rates per unit population, Council tax income per unit population, Grant Funding per unit population (2026–27) Not publicly available

Dataset – Council Tax bands and charges (council websites)
Metric – Council Tax band D (max/average) (2025/26) https://exeter.gov.uk/council-tax/how-much-is-my-council-tax/bands-and-charges-2025-2026/ https://eastdevon.gov.uk/council-tax/council-tax-faqs/what-does-council-tax-pay-for-who-to-speak-to-about-the-police-fire-parish-charges-for-2025-26/ https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/council-tax/council-tax-bandings-and-how-your-tax-is-spent/charges-for-202526/ https://www.northdevon.gov.uk/council-tax/council-tax-charges-and-how-it-is-spent https://www.torridge.gov.uk/media/27847/2025-26-Council-Tax-Charges/pdf/2025-26_Council_Tax_Charges.pdf https://www.westdevon.gov.uk/council-tax/about-council-tax/how-my-council-tax-spent https://www.southhams.gov.uk/council-tax/about-council-tax/how-my-council-tax-spent https://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/council-tax/about-council-tax/council-tax-bands-and-spending-explained/how-the-council-tax-bands-are-set/ https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/council-tax-bands-and-charges https://www.torbay.gov.uk/council-tax/bands/
Dataset – Council Taxbase
Metric – Council Tax base (2025–26) https://committees.exeter.gov.uk/documents/s97476/Report%20-%20Council%20Tax%20Base%20-%202025-26%20v2%20FINAL.pdf https://democracy.eastdevon.gov.uk/documents/s25833/Council+Tax+base+2025+-+2026.pdf https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=1908&Ver=4 https://democracy.northdevon.gov.uk/documents/s30263/Council%20Tax%20Base%20202526.pdf https://democracy.torridge.gov.uk/documents/s33418/7%20-%20Budget%202025-26%20MTFS.pdf https://democracy.swdevon.gov.uk/documents/s33470/Council%20Tax%20202526.pdf https://democracy.swdevon.gov.uk/documents/s33464/Council%20Tax%20Committee%20Report%2025-26%20South%20Hams.pdf https://democracy.teignbridge.gov.uk/documents/s21240/Report+app+A+council+tax+base.pdf https://democracy.plymouth.gov.uk/documents/s150891/Council%20Tax%20Base%20Setting%202025-26.pdf https://www.torbay.gov.uk/DemocraticServices/documents/b49548/Item+11+Council+Tax+Base+202526+Thursday+05-Dec-2024+17.30+Council.pdf?T=9

Dataset – Statement of accounts (council websites)

Metric – Non-Earmarked reserves (latest available)

- <https://exeter.gov.uk/media/2h4dkgwi/statement-of-accounts-2023-24-final.pdf>
- https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/mc4dq4wf/eddc-statement-of-accounts-2024-25_draft_.pdf
- <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/357530/draft-mddc-statement-of-accounts-2024-25.pdf>
- <https://www.northdevon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/Draft%20Statement%20of%20Accounts%202024-25.pdf>
- https://www.torridge.gov.uk/media/28062/2024-25-Statement-of-Accounts-Unaudited/pdf/2025-26_Statements_Unaudited_V1.pdf?m=1751298916097
- <https://www.westdevon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/WD%20Draft%20Statement%20of%20Accounts%202024-25.pdf>
- <https://www.southhams.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/SH%20Draft%20Statement%20of%20Accounts%202024-25.pdf>
- <https://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/media/23pesxmy/2024-25-draft-statement-of-accounts-with-strata.pdf>
- https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-07/2024_25%20DRAFT%20Statement%20of%20Accounts.pdf
- https://www.torbay.gov.uk/media/21461/torbay-accounts-2023_24-with-audited-opinion.pdf

Dataset – Newton Model: Local Government Reform: Impact on People Services

Metric – People Services Savings, Adult Social Care Spend per resident, Children’s Social Care Spend per resident (2025)

- Not publicly available

The quantitative analysis was a mathematically driven comparative analysis, based on the level of balance between each option for each metric used. Any option that would put any proposed unitary councils on the best foundation collectively would be best for all residents of Devon. This is because any option that created an overwhelmingly strong result for a single proposed unitary authority would likely mean depriving another unitary in a key area, such as access to economic development or a firmer financial footing for the council. In order to calculate balance, we calculated the difference between the highest and lowest figures for each metric within a given option. The lower the balance figure, the more balanced an option was deemed to be for that metric. This was then compared between all eight options and ranked based on the comparative level of balance for each metric, with the most imbalanced options receiving a Low score, up through Medium and High for the most balanced options. Each metric rank across a criterion was then summed to create a single comparative score for each metric, which were also scored high, medium or low.

4-5-1 (Option C) for comparison

4-5-1 option		Government criteria	Assessment Metric	Difference	U1	U2	U3
	1. Establishing a single tier of Local Government	Geographic area (sq km)	3,790.89	2,809.38	3,803.26	84.37	
		Council Tax band D (average)	74.50	2,399.92	2,396.49	2,325.42	
		Council Tax band D (max)	145.90	2,471.32	2,433.26	2,325.42	
		GVA per capita (£)	8,338.11	26,452.65	28,790.76	25,936.23	
		Housing Delivery (%)	14%	100%	114%	113%	
		Population density	3,044.58	148.52	148.79	3,185.37	
		Council Tax base	123,759.85	168,382.01	200,316.85	76,557.90	
		Population	278,092	426,155	546,738	268,736	
		Population 2040	347,423	471,674	627,074	279,652	
		Business Rates (£) per unit population	54.35	217.53	190.86	245.21	
	2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks	Council tax income (£) per unit population	248.58	828.11	772.17	579.53	
		Grant Funding per unit population	157.97	320.07	293.74	451.71	
		Non-Earmarked Reserves*	75,187,000	12,911,000	15,943,000	-60,138,000	
		Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream %	3%	5%	5%	8%	
		People Services Savings (£)	0		32,760,000		
		Adult Social Care Spend per resident 2025 (£)	75	523	461	447	
		Children's Social Care Spend per resident 2025 (£)	35	192	157	173	
		Deprivation score	0.95	0.12	0.1	0.15	
		Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) Apr-Jun 2024	0.37	1.34	1.71	1.58	
		Rough Sleeper Count (Autumn 2023)	23	48	63	41	
	3. High quality and sustainable services	Number of Households in TA per 1,000 population Apr-Jun 2024	2.36	0.69	1.62	3.05	
		Total number of households in B&B Hotels Apr-Jun 2024	136	51	74	187	
		65+ Population	85,643	119,832	136,244	50,691	
		Female life expectancy	2.13	84.56	84.25	82.43	
		Unemployment rates	0.98	2.76	2.54	3.52	
		Crime rates	34.82	62.21	60.14	94.96	
		Travel time	1h55min	2h	2h10min	15min	

Summary of 3 unitary model:

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

Figure: Excerpt of the data tables used to determine level of balance between proposed unitary authorities to aid early discussions

Government criteria	Assessment Metric	Option A	Option B	Option C 451	Option C+	Option D	Option E	Option F	Option G
1. Establishing a single tier of Local Government	Geographic area (sq km)	8.00	7.78	2.70	2.48	1.58	1.00	1.10	5.37
	Council Tax band D (average)	5.82	6.94	6.11	1.00	5.15	1.11	8.00	1.96
	Council Tax band D (max)	8.00	8.00	8.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	8.00	1.00
	GVA per capita (£)	1.00	4.92	4.50	4.60	3.51	8.00	5.32	7.39
	Housing Delivery (%)	1.00	8.00	2.36	2.36	2.69	2.63	1.51	1.17
	Population density	7.85	7.90	7.86	3.33	1.00	1.83	8.00	1.78
	Council Tax base	8.00	7.37	3.15	2.98	2.22	1.00	1.95	4.53
	Population	8.00	7.88	3.07	2.92	2.83	1.00	1.89	4.71
	Population 2040	8.00	7.84	3.40	3.27	2.81	1.00	2.10	4.60
	Business Rates (£) per unit population	3.79	8.00	5.71	5.27	1.00	6.61	6.46	6.81
2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks	Council tax income (£) per unit population	5.87	6.40	7.28	6.12	1.00	4.46	8.00	4.36
	Grant Funding per unit population	2.91	8.00	3.51	2.85	1.00	2.50	3.83	1.93
	Non-Earmarked Reserves*	8.00	5.41	2.77	2.65	3.72	1.00	2.01	3.63
	Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream %	3.26	8.00	3.33	3.33	3.73	5.25	8.00	1.00
	People Services Savings	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Adult Social Care Spend per resident 2025	1.00	8.00	2.56	2.74	2.78	3.78	3.81	2.26
	Children's Social Care Spend per resident 2025	1.00	8.00	2.49	2.68	2.58	3.64	3.40	2.25
	Deprivation score	4.54	8.00	5.59	1.97	1.00	2.57	6.79	3.17
	Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) Apr-Jun 2024	1.00	8.00	3.93	3.84	2.72	4.57	2.72	4.19
	Rough Sleeper Count (Autumn 2023)	8.00	6.22	2.65	2.74	4.71	1.09	1.00	4.81
3. High quality and sustainable services	Number of Households in TA per 1,000 population Apr-Jun 2024	3.53	2.52	6.17	5.67	1.00	5.20	8.00	3.08
	Total number of households in B&B Hotels Apr-Jun 2024	1.00	1.00	5.84	6.00	7.41	7.43	8.00	6.00
	65+ Population	8.00	6.91	2.86	2.71	2.10	1.00	1.59	4.79
	Female life expectancy	7.30	7.86	7.90	1.93	1.00	1.93	8.00	1.59
	Unemployment rates	5.23	5.68	6.93	1.58	1.00	2.98	8.00	3.00
	Crime rates	1.73	6.01	2.18	2.18	1.00	8.00	6.87	4.50
	Travel time	8.00	8.00	5.53	5.53	1.00	4.29	4.71	6.76

Figure: Ranking of balance between the eight options to inform metric level scores

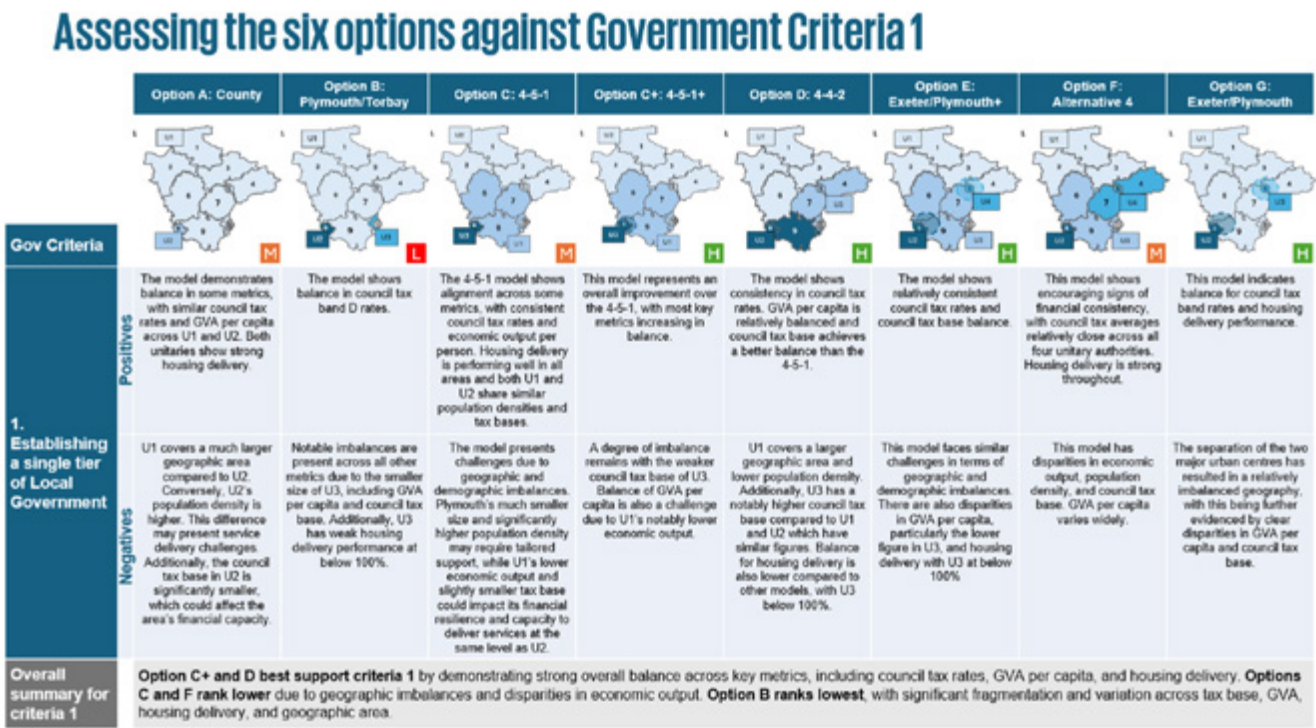


Figure: Narrative of quantitative assessment of each option against criteria 1. This was also produced for Criteria 2 and 3

Qualitative assessment

For government criteria 4 – 6 we conducted a qualitative assessment, noting that these criteria rely less on quantitative analysis and more on place-based factors. This assessment involved input from local stakeholders to define sensible assessment factors and metrics. We created draft narratives and ranked the options as high, medium, or low based on the options perceived ability to meet that criteria.

For the assessment of options against government criteria 4-6, we considered factors such as local identity, alignment with NHS and fire, police boundaries, and alignment with travel-to-work areas and the interaction between housing and labour markets. We also looked at the population within a strategic authority, the ability to deliver strong community engagement and the ability to address unparished areas.

Figure: Metrics used for qualitative analysis of Criteria 4 – 6

Criteria 4. Working together to understand and meet local needs

Guidance	Assessment Factor	Metrics
4a. Local engagement and addressing concerns	Local identity	Sense of identity Alignment with NHS and Fire, Police boundaries Alignment with Travel to Work Areas

Criteria 5. Supporting devolution arrangements

Guidance	Assessment Factor	Metrics
5b. Population ratios between local authorities and strategic authority, and aligned timeline	Population within a Strategic Authority	Population

Criteria 6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

Guidance	Assessment Factor	Metrics
6a. Community engagement plans	Engagement planning	Ability to deliver strong community engagement
6b. Enabling strong community engagement	Existing engagement arrangements	Ability to address unparished areas

We also outlined the key considerations for selecting an LGR model based on interview responses. These considerations included boundary stability, population balance, service continuity, local support and identity, alignment with government priorities, and governance simplicity. We emphasised the importance of a smooth transition without disrupting existing administrative areas, balancing population distribution, supporting the integration of housing and social services, prioritising local delivery of services, ensuring economic hubs, and addressing areas of deprivation.

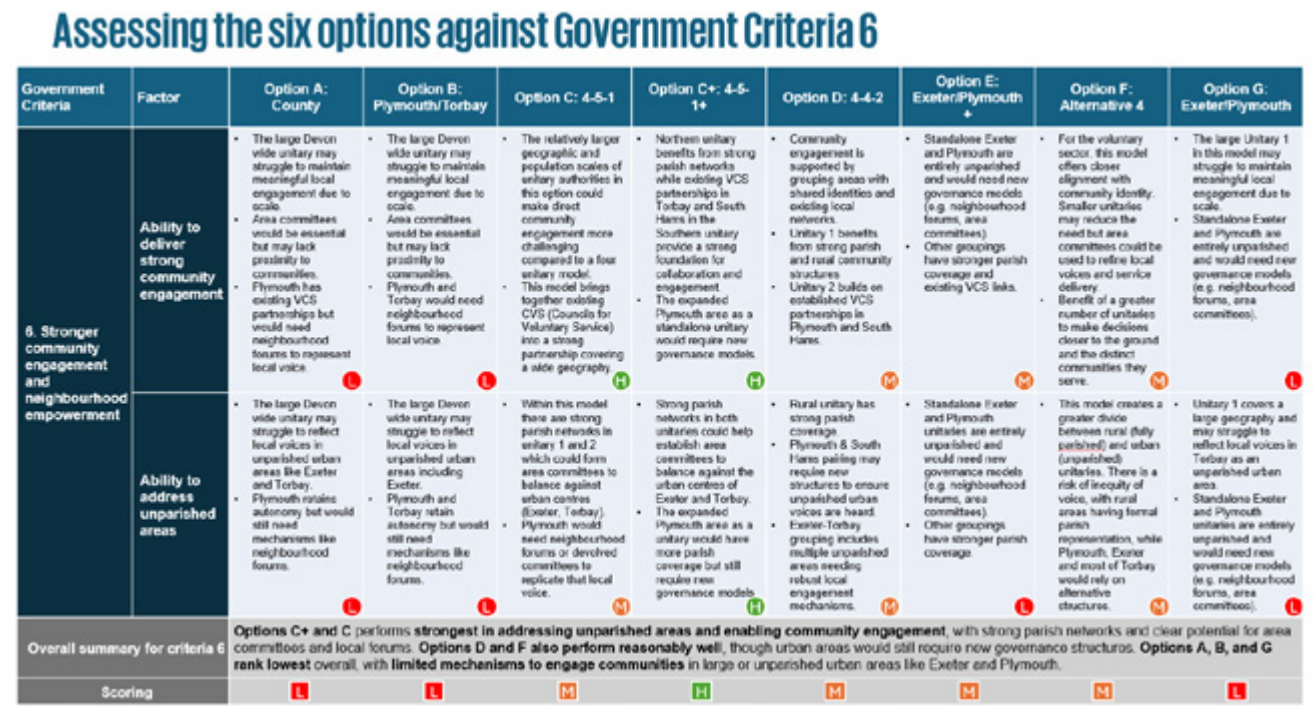
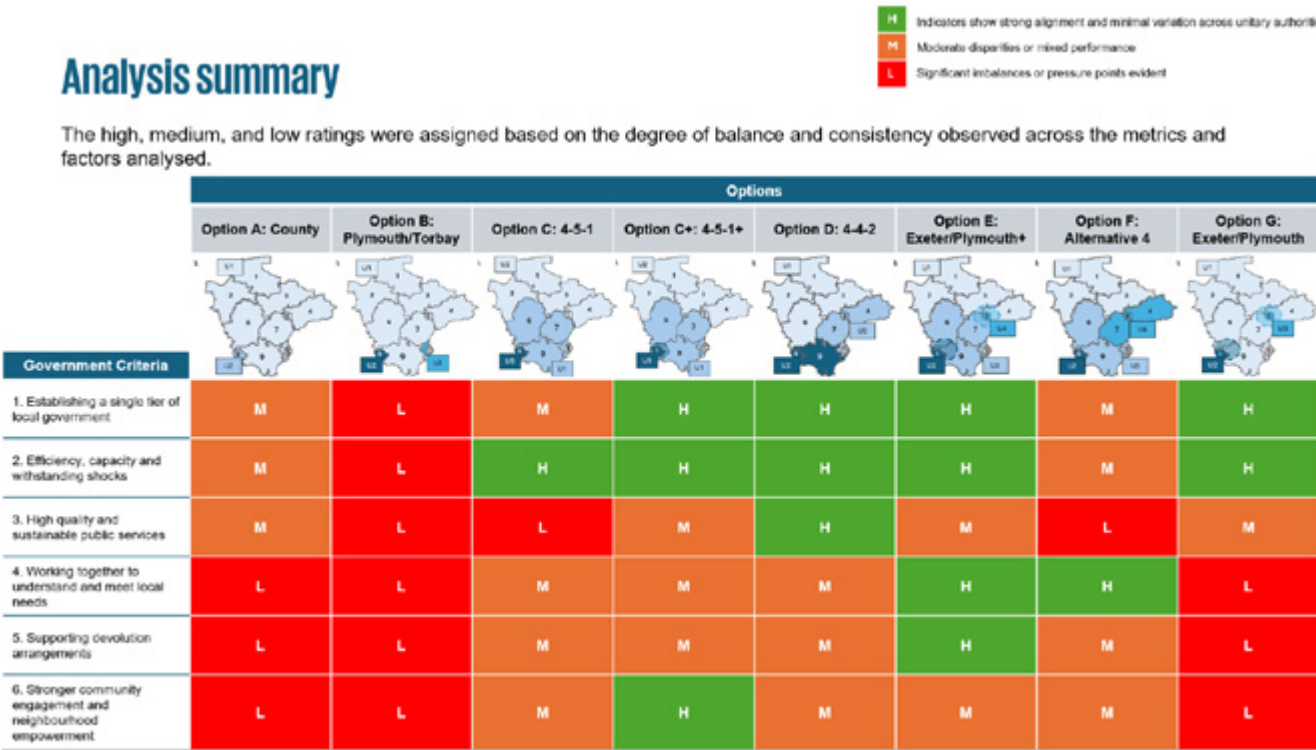


Figure: Qualitative assessment of each option against criteria 6

Finally, we presented a high-level comparison of the eight options, using a colour-coded system to indicate the level of alignment and variation in performance across the government criteria. The output of this exercise can be found below. This comparison helped us identify which options met, partially met, or did not meet each criterion. Following this approach, Chief Executives and Leaders across the councils involved deliberated on which option to take forward, using the outputs of this appraisal to aid discussion.



Analysis summary

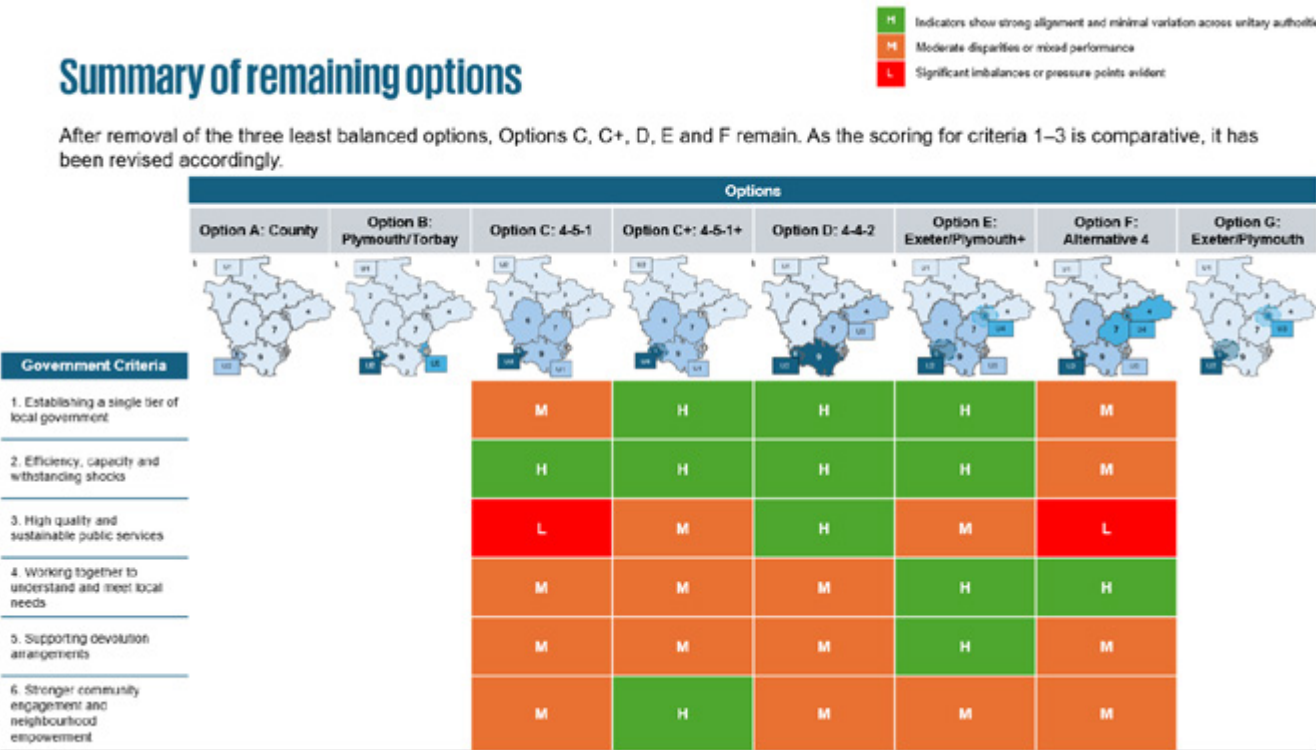
The high, medium, and low ratings were assigned based on the degree of balance and consistency observed across the metrics and factors analysed.

Figure: High, Medium and Low visual comparison for the initial eight options appraised

Shortlisting process

After each option was assessed individually, we compared all eight options in order to narrow down the list of options to the most viable. We performed this shortlisting through a two-stage process. The first stage involved eliminating the lowest scoring options from the initial analysis. These were options A, B and G. Option B was assessed as having low scores across all criteria, with wide disparities across population, GVA, housing delivery, tax base, reserves, and social indicators. There would also be limited alignment with local identities and community engagement. Options A and G demonstrated low scores across criteria four, five and six. Option A was assessed as having population and geographic disparities that would limit engagement mechanisms, and option G would have misalignment with service boundaries, lack of population balance resulting in disparities across key metrics, and weak ability to engage communities.

Having eliminated these figures, another comparison was made. Due to the comparative nature of the quantitative assessment, some individual metric scores across criteria one to three changed after elimination of options A, B and G as the overall difference in balance figures that drove the assessment changed. This was then presented as a high-level visual comparison to aid discussion.



Summary of remaining options

After removal of the three least balanced options, Options C, C+, D, E and F remain. As the scoring for criteria 1–3 is comparative, it has been revised accordingly.

Figure: High, Medium and Low visual comparison for the remaining five options appraised

The five remaining criteria were then assessed using additional filters to narrow down the shortlist further. These filters were based on a combination of further application of the government criteria, along with key considerations based on the unique needs and geographies of Devon:

1.
- The three major urban areas of Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay should not be included within the same Unitary. Placing these urban areas in separate authorities ensures that populations and economic metrics remain more balanced between proposed unitaries. Additionally, placing Plymouth and Torbay in separate authorities prevents implementation issues with aggregating existing upper tier authorities between themselves and the County Council.
2.
- Only boundary changes in Plymouth will be considered and cannot expand beyond the five immediate neighbouring parishes in South Hams. Within these five parishes are the urban sprawl that is currently connected to Plymouth and part of its spatial plan, known as the Plymouth Policy Area in the Plymouth and South West Devon Local Plan. Any further expansion would cover rural areas and/or parts of Dartmoor National Park, creating practical delivery issues and an unfocused identity.

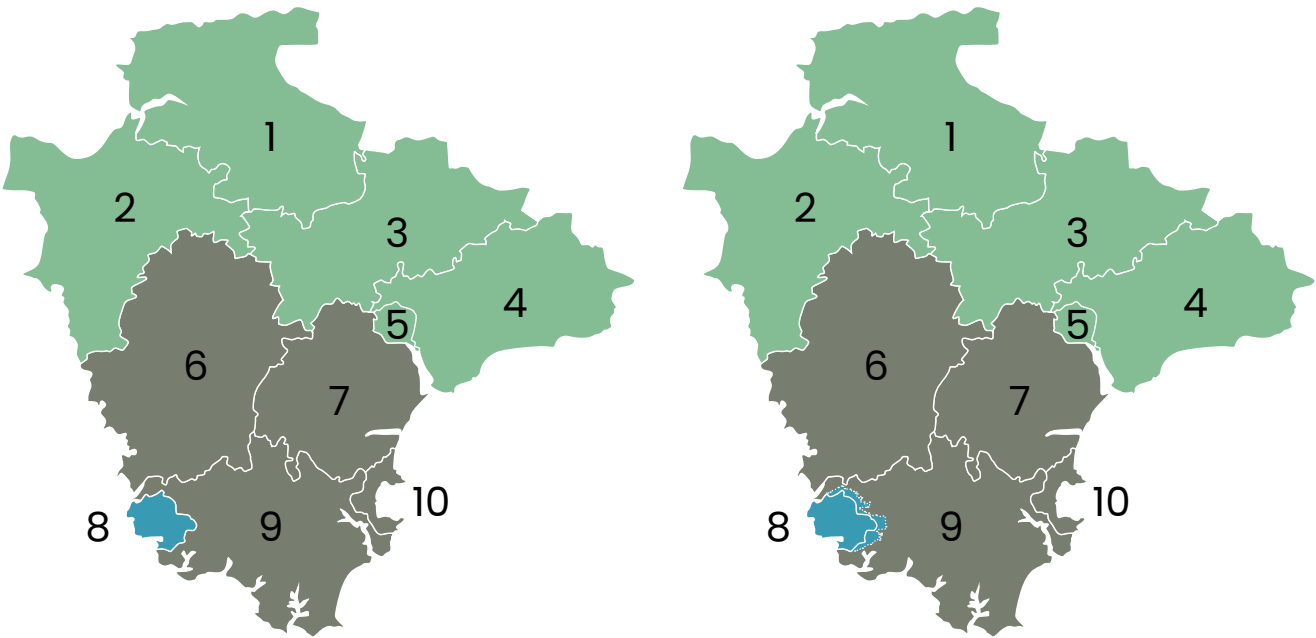
By using these considerations as filters on the five remaining options, we eliminated option D and option E. Option D would not satisfy the first filter, as Torbay and Exeter would exist in the same unitary authority footprint. Option E would not satisfy the second filter, as there would be boundary changes beyond Plymouth, and Plymouth’s boundary changes would encompass more than the five neighbouring parishes in South Hams. After eliminating these options, the final three remaining options were presented in a final comparison for discussion and decision by participating Chief Executives and Council Leaders.

Government Criteria	Options							
	Option A: County	Option B: Plymouth/Torbay	Option C: 4-5-1	Option C+: 4-5-1+	Option D: 4-4-2	Option E: Exeter/Plymouth+	Option F: Alternative 4	Option G: Exeter/Plymouth
1. Establishing a single tier of local government – Comparative score updated			L	H			L	
2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks – Comparative score updated			H	H			L	
3. High quality and sustainable public services – Comparative score updated			L	H			L	
4. Working together to understand and meet local needs			M	M			H	
5. Supporting devolution arrangements			M	M			M	
6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment			M	H			M	

Figure: High, Medium and Low visual comparison for the final three options appraised

Options Appraisal Outcome

Following discussion on the individual merits of remaining options C, C+ and F, it was decided that option C was the best option for the residents of Devon, which is referred to throughout the main proposal as the 4-5-1 model. The points supporting this assessment have been demonstrated throughout the main proposal. It was also decided by some councillors that Option C+ would be the best option for the residents of Devon. This option is based off of 4-5-1, but with boundary changes that represent the urban sprawl extending from Plymouth that constitutes the Plymouth Policy Area in the Plymouth and South West Devon Local Plan. The case for this option is further documented in the 4-5-1 + Appendix.



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))

Figure: Chosen options (4-5-1 and 4-5-1+) to take forward to proposal to government

Appendix 4: Data tables

To inform the options appraisal process, data was collected from public sources for each council to facilitate an analysis of unitary configurations for each option. The following section lists the raw data for each metric gathered during this process. These metrics correspond to the alignment table with government criteria, as described in the options appraisal section.

	East Devon	Exeter	Mid Devon	North Devon	Plymouth	South Hams	Teignbridge	Torbay	Torridge	West Devon	Total/Ave
Population	156,167	137,050	84,148	100,543	268,736	90,842	137,074	139,485	68,830	58,754	1,241,629
Population 2028	167,523	142,984	88,834	106,612	274,325	95,228	143,237	142,397	71,254	61,002	1,293,397
Population 2040	188,117	150,327	96,732	115,990	279,652	103,009	154,750	148,235	75,908	65,681	1,378,400
Area (sqkm)	822.44	47.89	912.92	1,104.75	84.37	905.16	680.02	119.45	995.26	1,164.75	6,837
Council Tax Band D	2365.92	2379.9	2433.26	2410.82	2325.42	2390.80	2396.42	2339.84	2389.31	2463.55	2389.52
Non-Earmarked Reserves	4,800,000	5,883,000	2,025,000	1,238,000	-60,138,000	2,191,000	2,500,000	6,400,000	1,103,000	1,820,000	-3,217,800
GVA (m)	3,628	6,503	1,671	2,727	6,970	2,521	2,887	2,404	1,212	904	31,427
GVA per capita	23,231.54	47,449.84	19,857.87	27,122.72	25,936.23	27,751.48	21,061.62	17,234.83	17,608.60	15,386.19	24,264.09
Rough Sleeper Count	10	23	9	7	41	5	8	27	14	-	144
Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 households)	0.85	2.73	1.24	2.19	1.58	0.97	0.89	2.27	1.52	0.79	1.5
Number of Households in TA per 1,000 population	0.72	2.37	1.24	1.97	3.05	0.70	1.44	-	2.07	0.55	1.57
Total number of households in B&B Hotels	10	37	14	6	187	9	33		7	9	312
Male Life Expectancy	81.65	79.06	81.09	78.88	78.45	82.14	80.77	78.30	80.64	80.07	80.11
Female Life Expectancy	85.20	83.81	84.10	84.02	82.43	85.91	84.48	83.06	84.11	84.79	84.19
Income Deprivation	0.08	0.10	0.09	0.11	0.15	0.09	0.10	0.17	0.12	0.10	0.11
Income Deprivation – Rank	229	195	200	151	76	213	178	39	130	188	160
Unemployment (%)	2.24	2.64	2.39	2.87	3.52	2.91	2.57	2.83	2.55	2.75	2,73

	East Devon	Exeter	Mid Devon	North Devon	Plymouth	South Hams	Teignbridge	Torbay	Torridge	West Devon	Total/Ave
0–19 Population	30,329	28,878	18,272	20,751	59,851	17,610	26,737	27,547	13,127	11,118	254,220
20–64 Population	79,129	85,873	45,155	53,472	158,284	47,119	72,520	74,025	35,508	30,447	681,532
65+ Population	46,709	22,299	20,721	26,320	50,601	26,113	37,817	37,913	20,195	17,189	305,877
Housing Delivery (%)	118	110	86	120	113	113	83	66	120	113	104
Net Revenue (£k)	21,507	16,452	15,020	17,693	228,276	19,108	19,751	128,780	11,603	9,818	488,008
Financing Costs (£k)	2,481	7,461	1,133	60	18,262	376	–	12,208	24	719	42,724
Financing Costs % of NRE	12	45	8	0	8	2	0	9	0	7	9
NRE (£m)	149,345	128,641	83,903	99,997	228,276	93,471	131,959	128,780	67,947	57,914	1,170,234
Financing Costs (County Allocated) (£m)	6,782	11,235	3,450	2,829	18,262	2,878	3,775	12,208	1,919	2,337	65,675
Financing Costs % of NRE (County Allocated)	5	9	4	3	8	3	3	9	3	4	5
Council Tax base	65,142.52	39,852	30,732.91	37,670.43	76,557	44,327.29	51,562	49,254.24	26,407.80	22,132.28	443,638.47
Retained Business Rates (3)	14,647,005	31,089,926	7,321,741	11,713,618	43,791,747	11,073,670	12,626,922	14,042,904	4,897,828	3,901,377	155,106,738
Retained Business Rates (3) per unit population	93.79	226.85	87.01	116.50	162.95	121.90	92.12	100.68	71.16	66.40	124.92
Gross Council Tax Income (£)	154,121,991	94,843,775	74,781,161	90,816,626	178,027,179	105,977,685	123,564,208	115,247,041	63,096,421	54,523,978	1,055,000,065
Gross Council Tax Income (£) per unit population	986.90	692.04	888.69	903.26	662.46	1,166.62	901.44	826.23	916.70	928.00	887.23

The above table covers data points at a District/Unitary level across Devon to avoid double counting. Figures to note for Devon County Council are as below.

- Net Revenue Expenditure (£k) – £682,226m
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2023-to-2024-individual-local-authority-data-outturn>
- Non Earmarked Reserves – £16.036m
<https://www.devon.gov.uk/finance-and-budget/audit-and-inspection/>
(Unaudited statement of accounts 2024/25)
- Financing Costs (£k) – 22,951
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2023-to-2024-individual-local-authority-data-outturn>
- Financing Costs % of NRE – 3%

Appendix 5:

Our Proposal – compliance statement

On 5 February 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government invited the local authorities in two tier areas to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government. This section constitutes our Proposal for the reorganisation of the historic county of Devon based on whole district boundaries as we were invited and requested to do. Our Proposal has been prepared in accordance with Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the Act).

In preparing our Proposal, we have had 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.

Our Proposal

Configuration 4-5-1

Our Proposal groups the existing principal authorities into three unitary councils without any changes to existing district or borough council boundaries.

- **Unitary A**
South Hams District Council,
Teignbridge District Council,
Torbay Council,
West Devon Borough Council
- **Unitary B**
East Devon District Council,
Exeter City Council,
Mid Devon District Council,
North Devon District Council,
Torridge District Council
- **Unitary C**
Plymouth City Council

Our Proposal is a Type A proposal within the meaning of section 2(4) of the Act.

Suggested modifications to Our Proposal

We have noted the Secretary of State’s powers of modification in section 7 of the Act. To that end and were the Secretary of State so minded, we suggest that our Proposal might be modified by way of altering boundaries to better achieve our ambition. The modifications are not so extensive as to transform our Proposal into an entirely different animal and therefore we consider them to be within the Secretary of State’s powers.

Appendix 1: 4-5-1+ explains the modifications (4-5-1+) that we are suggesting the Secretary of State might consider when thinking about the exercise of his powers.

We show the precise areas that would be involved in boundary changes. Our Proposal sets out the rationale for the modifications and provides an overview of how these suggested modifications perform against the Government’s criteria.

If our Proposal is modified as we suggest, it would group the existing principal authorities into three unitary councils with the changes to existing district or borough council boundaries as described.

As with our Proposal, the modifications would maintain the proposal as a Type A proposal.

Option 4-5-1+

- **Unitary A: Torbay and Southern Devon**
A new unitary council based on the current boundaries of South Hams District Council, Teignbridge District Council, Torbay Council, West Devon Borough Council with a population of 426,155 with a Ministerial modification to subtract the Plymouth Policy Area (PPA) as defined in the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local 2014-34 (March 2019) resulting in a population of 419,555 and to include the addition of the area of Dartmoor National Park currently located within the administrative boundary of Mid Devon District Council.
- **Unitary B: Exeter and Northern Devon**
A new unitary council based on the current boundaries of East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council, Mid Devon District Council, North Devon District Council, Torridge District Council with a Ministerial modification to subtract the area of Dartmoor National Park currently located within the administrative boundary of Mid Devon District Council.
- **Unitary C: An expanded Plymouth City Council**
The continuing unitary council of Plymouth City Council with a population of 268,736 with a Ministerial modification to include the Plymouth Policy Area (PPA) as defined in the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local 2014-34 (March 2019) resulting in a population of 275,336.

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