

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **CABINET** held on 26 November 2025 at 7.40 pm

**Present  
Councillors**

L Taylor (Leader), D Wulff (Deputy Leader),  
J Lock, J M Downes, G Duchesne,  
M Fletcher, S Keable and J Wright

**Apology  
Councillor**

N Bradshaw (online)

**Also Present  
Councillors**

C Adcock, E Buczkowski, J Buczkowski, J Cairney, G  
Czapiewski, S Clist, G Cochran, L Knight and T Stanford

**Also Present  
Officers**

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Andrew Jarrett (Deputy  
Chief Executive (S151)), Maria De Leburne (Director of  
Legal, People & Governance (Monitoring Officer)), Laura  
Woon (Democratic Services Manager), Angie Howell  
(Democratic Services Officer) and Sarah Lees (Democratic  
Services Officer)

**Councillors  
Online**

M Farrell and L G J Kennedy

**71. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor N Bradshaw.

**72. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Leader reminded those present that all Members of the Council had been granted a dispensation to allow them to speak and vote in any debate on any matter that related to devolution or Local Government reorganisation in Devon.

The Director for Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) stated the following:

- Members were reminded that under the Localism Act 2011, councillors may express views or campaign on issues without automatically being deemed to have predetermined their position. However, it was essential that all Members

approached this matter with an open mind and were ready to consider all relevant information and debate before voting.

- In relation to allowances received from another authority involved in the reorganisation, which could constitute a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI), there was a dispensation to allow participation. However, members were reminded that the dispensation did not override the legal requirement to avoid bias or predetermination.

### **73. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

None received.

### **74. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION SUBMISSION**

The Leader highlighted the following points raised at the Extraordinary Council meeting:

- There was a lot of reference to and discussion about potential distances needing to be travelled for meetings, which were addressed during the earlier meeting.
- No submission could provide a perfect solution for a unitary council in rural Devon without losing local representation.
- He acknowledged and understood the loss of local representation.
- There was some confusion around discussions of the Strategic Mayoral Authority (SMA), although the Council was not voting on this.
- Most councils in Devon had appeared supportive of a Strategic Mayoral Authority because of potential financial benefits and the budget allocation for the Mayor's office.
- The earlier meeting had included good levels of discussion and debate.
- He supported for the 4-5-1 proposal, considering it the best option for this Council.
- He thanked officers and personal from consultants (KPMG), for their significant contributions and collaboration.
- There had been extensive collaboration, discussion and debate over the past months.
- Regardless of the Government's final decision, everyone would work together for the best outcome. The process had been challenging over the last 12 months but he hoped Devon could move forward positively.
- Many politicians had not been in favour but acknowledged the change was inevitable.

Discussion took place with regards to:

- That localism and proportional representation would be lost and that the decision would likely be politically driven, causing rural communities to suffer. The matter had been fully debated through Council, which had given its support and there had been no time left due to the Government's timeline to make changes.
- Cabinet Members thanked the Leader for enabling discussion at full Council and allowing all Members to have their voices heard. There had been speculation during the Council meeting and that some issues would need to

be resolved later. The decision faced was whether to submit the proposal before the deadline, knowing that the final decision would rest with central Government.

- Members reflected on a quotation from County Councillor Brazil, the Liberal Democrat Leader at Devon County Council: *“At the end of this process, we all had to come together, our duties are to deliver the services residents deserved”*.
- The proper funding needed for local government and the unfairness of Devon’s low funding for children compared to other areas and the frustration that councillors were not making the final decision. There had been a consensus that Government was forcing this process and the Minister would ultimately decide after consultation next spring.
- Shadow elections were expected in May 2027, and all public services would need to work together to deliver for residents.
- The submission was strong and well written and the Cabinet thanked those who had prepared it.
- Three issues were raised:
  - The challenge of online engagement and voting under the 4-5-1 model.
  - The importance of neighbourhood area committees, local community networks, and Parish and Town Councils in maintaining engagement and decision-making, particularly for ecosystem management such as the Exe Estuary, which would be split under the 4-5-1 model.
  - The lack of engagement with MPs, this was essential given that this reorganisation undermined democracy. It was explained that the Leader sympathised with the concerns of travel and that the Standards Committee had responded to the Government Consultation enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at Council meetings. The Council were now awaiting a White Paper to introduce voting rights for those online at meetings.
- Cabinet urged decisionmakers to study the document carefully to understand Devon’s needs, noting the balance required between economies of scale and the differing challenges of urban and rural communities. As the Cabinet Member for Service Delivery & Continuous Improvement stated, Mid Devon had a long-standing commitment to running and owning its services locally and employing local people.
- That the Cabinet and the Leader keep pushing for a Devon wide referendum rather than allowing Westminster politicians to make the final decision. Without a referendum, there would be no democratic mandate and that the referendum should include a “no change” option.
- Regarding the referendum it was important but Members questioned whether including a “no change” option would be honest, as Cabinet would know it could not be delivered. Concerns about misleading the public and the cost of holding a referendum, citing South Somerset’s experience where the result was ignored. It was stated that the Leader acknowledged that a referendum would not be legally binding and that the Government would ultimately decide but clarified that the proposal was for the Cabinet to press the Government to hold a Devon wide referendum.
- MPs had received a copy of the proposal and related communications, as they would have with other submissions. It was explained it was clear that reducing councillor numbers and reorganising Local Government was stated Government policy.
- The concerns about the referendum and the cost implications.

The Leader **MOVED** that:

1. Cabinet approves the 'Reimagining Devon – Believe in Better' proposal for submission to government as its formal LGR response.

Upon a vote being taken the **MOTION** was declared to have been **CARRIED**.

The Leader **MOVED** that:

2. That Cabinet notes its specific support for the expanded Plymouth boundary, preferably as described in the 451+ modification, but also to acknowledge the potential to amend this further should the Secretary of State consider such a modification necessary to implement the 451 proposal.

Upon a vote being taken the **MOTION** was declared to have been **CARRIED**.

The Leader **MOVED** that:

3. That delegated authority is given to the Chief Executive in conjunction with the Leader, to submit the proposal on behalf of Mid Devon District Council and to continue discussions with Ministers and Officials to advocate for the successful implementation of this proposal.

Upon a vote being taken the **MOTION** was declared to have been **CARRIED**.

The Leader **MOVED** that:

4. The Leader of the Council, to write to Government, to press for a Devon wide referendum on the proposals, with a choice of 'no change' to let the residents of Devon decide, separate to the submission.

Upon a vote being taken the **MOTION** was declared to have been **CARRIED**.

Note:

- i. Cllr J Lock voted against
- ii. Report previously circulated

(The meeting ended at 20:27pm)

**LEADER**