

JOINT STATEMENT: Devon District Councils - update on devolution and local government reform

This joint statement is made following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper

"The Devon districts are fully supportive of genuine devolution of powers from Whitehall to local government. However, following the publication of the Devolution White Paper, and subsequent statements by the leader of Devon County Council, we would like to make it clear that we do not support the creation of one unitary council for Devon.

"Our county, including Torbay, is diverse and made up of nearly 1 million residents across urban, coastal, and rural areas. Any reform of local government in Devon should follow a period of proper consultation with residents, businesses, elected representatives, and stakeholders. Looking at the evidence, we should decide collectively what is best for our area. A single unitary council for the county risks diminishing local representation, with decision-making that is remote from the communities we serve.

"We do not support postponing the county council elections scheduled for May 2025. The government has indicated that this will only happen in priority areas who have clear and agreed plans. This is not the case in Devon, so we cannot be in the first phase of these reforms.

"We recognise that the government's white paper sets a clear direction of travel. As Devon's city, district, and borough council leaders, we want to work collaboratively with others in particular with our neighbouring unitary councils to agree how we respond to this. Any changes must be carefully considered, transparent, and inclusive, ensuring that residents and businesses are fully engaged in shaping the future governance of Devon.

"Our objective must be to get this right for our residents and businesses. That cannot be achieved if we make rushed decisions that have not been given the serious consideration that they deserve."

Statement agreed by the following leaders:

CLLr Paul Arnott, East Devon, CLLr Phil Bialyk, Exeter, CLLr Julian Brazil, South Hams, CLLr David Clayton, North Devon, CLLr Mandy Ewings, West Devon, CLLr Ken James, Torridge, CLLr Richard Keeling, Teignbridge, CLLr Luke Taylor, Mid Devon