

- Report for:** **Scrutiny Committee**

specifically, as well as providing an update on the known journey of other councils across Devon.

National Policy Update

- 2.0 As members will be aware, recent ministerial changes have occurred in the relevant department within government (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – MHCLG). At the time of drafting, there has been limited new statements or commentary made by the incoming Secretary of State other than to swiftly reaffirm the commitment to housebuilding and the 1.5m national housing delivery target. However, it is expected that further announcements and discussions with the local government sector will be forthcoming over the coming days and weeks. Importantly, at this point in time, there is no indication that the anticipated timeline for submission will be amended, nor that government will be reconsidering its position on LGR.

Local Policy Positions

- 3.0 The known position has not changed significantly from when the committee was last updated on this item. However, there is some emerging clarity as further detail emerges, not least the publication during August of Exeter City's proposal to expand to cover an additional 49 parishes in the East Devon (28), Teignbridge (15) and Mid Devon (6) area.
- 3.1 The committee will be aware of this council's current policy position on supported proposals, but for clarity it appears that there are now broadly three or four likely proposals being worked up by Devon authorities for final submission to government.
- a) The 451/145 model, supported by 8 of the 11 councils (including Mid Devon)
 - b) The Plymouth proposal, which sees them wish to expand to take over 13 parishes currently within the South Hams area (this is clearly opposed by South Hams)
 - c) The Exeter proposal, which sees Exeter wishing to become a unitary council on its own (this proposal will likely also recognise Plymouth's ambition to expand), with the remainder of Devon as either one or two administrative areas
 - d) The county council proposal for one single council covering the whole of Devon, leaving Plymouth as an existing unitary area (and possibly leaving Torbay, subject to final considerations by DCC's cabinet)
- 3.2 As with previous reports, it should be noted that each of these proposals will be assessed against the criteria as set by government, and there is no one 'right' answer that performs the best across all metrics. As members will be

familiar from their own discussion and debate, perspectives on scale vs localism, or the priority of place and democracy over economy of provision, are ones that each proposal will be considering in order to advocate for the advantages of one proposal over another.

- 3.3 It is worth noting that since the last update to scrutiny, a tranche of data has been made available relating to the costs of providing care services across Devon. This has been useful to confirm that reconfiguring the way social care is provided and commissioned across the current 3 upper tier authorities to the 3 new councils proposed by the 451 model as supported by the majority of councils across Devon, is achievable without significant financial impact.

Public Engagement

- 4.0 All councils across Devon have done some sort of public engagement exercise and all will have their own view on the results. Nevertheless, it is probably an accurate reflection to say that, at least anecdotally, there was some frustration that the public wasn't given a 'full set' of proposals and given an opportunity to comment on those. There were valid reasons for this, not least because the full detail of some proposals only emerged in August, and to this date there has been no official decision made at DCC as to what it intends to submit. However, it is worth being mindful of the fact that there will be a full formal public consultation exercise conducted in 2026 as part of the statutory LGR process. This was simply the opening opportunity to engage, and most councils took the view that it was better to be open and transparent about what was being considered and why, and to seek views on what was important to people when consideration was being given to the form and function of new council proposals.
- 4.1 So, to the outcomes and results from the Mid Devon survey, which was run alongside a number of others and sought to follow the same format so that results could be amalgamated prior to the submission of our proposal in November. We had 363 responses, mainly from residents (88.7%), although some also responded as businesses, councillors, towns and parishes, or from the voluntary and community sector. The demographic makeup of respondents can be found in the graphs towards the end of Appendix A, but it is worth noting that over 80% of responses were from those aged over 50, with almost half from those aged over 65. This shows that for future public consultation process next year, greater attention should be paid to actively seeking to foster interest and response from younger people in the district, since the new councils will have remit and responsibility for children's services, education and youth services among others.
- 4.2 The full report is available at Appendix A, so members are free to review the entirety of feedback. However, it is perhaps worth highlighting a few key points. Firstly, roughly 2/3rds of people either wanted to be kept informed by

their council but didn't wish to get more involved, or were comfortable being kept informed by their town or parish council (Q14). This points to the strength of our town and parish council network as key pillars of community engagement, and supports the council's approach of seeking to strengthen these channels of information to support and enable our parishes. This is being actively facilitated through such approaches as our State of the District Debate, which was held on 17th September and focused on learning about LGR from those that have been through it previously. This was a very positive session with a wide range of attendance, including from the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC), and all participants benefitted from the considered wisdom and experience shared by colleagues from the town, parish and community development sector in Somerset.

- 4.3 Secondly, Qs 10 through 13 point to people's priorities about what they like about Mid Devon, what they would like to be improved, their hopes and dreams for the future, and the biggest perceived challenges for their area. It is worth noting the hierarchy and ranking of these items, and while it should be acknowledged that our survey provider's prioritisation tool was more clunky than some (which put some off from completing these sections), they provide a valuable source of information on how people feel about Mid Devon and what they believe the challenges of the future are to unlock their hopes and dreams. It should be noted that these will be pertinent to the roles and remits of all future councils no matter what their new administrative boundaries, hence the intent to share this data across the county via the existing partnership networks.

Next Steps

- 5.0 Finally, and as stated previously, the deadline for submission remains the 28th November 2025. The expectation is that the final submission will come to full council beforehand, but with the regularly-scheduled meeting of council being on 29th October, it is likely that a further extraordinary meeting will be scheduled to accommodate this. It is recognised that this will be the third such extraordinary meeting this calendar year, however it is considered vital to ensure members are fully involved and engaged in the process, as well as being consistent with making all such information publicly available for our residents, businesses, partners and all the communities served across Mid Devon.

Financial Implications

None arising from this report; no decisions are being recommended.

Legal Implications

None arising from this report; no decisions are being recommended.

Risk Assessment

The corporate risk register contains an item on local government reorganisation, which is updated monthly in accordance with normal risk management protocols.

Impact on Climate Change

None arising from this report; no decisions are being recommended.

Equalities Impact Assessment

None arising from this report; no decisions are being recommended.

Relationship to Corporate Plan

The local government reorganisation process seeks to abolish the county council and all district councils in Devon. Once this process is formally initiated, public service provisioning will continue, but they will be under the remit of a new organisation and new council entity.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Maria de Leburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 16 September 2025

Performance and risk:

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: N/A

Cabinet member notified: YES

Contact:

Stephen Walford, Chief Executive

Telephone: 01884 255255

Background papers:

The report refers to previous Extraordinary Meetings of Full Council – agendas available online. Appendices enclosed as referenced within the report.