
Report for: Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	26/11/2025
Subject:	Local Government Reorganisation Submission
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Luke Taylor, Leader
Responsible Officer:	Stephen Walford, Chief Executive
Exempt:	None
Wards Affected:	All
Enclosures:	Appendix A: LGR Submission: Reimagining Devon – Believe in Better Appendix B: Equality Impact Assessment

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

To receive the full Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) submission document and approve its submission to government.

To ensure that the Council responds to the invitation to submit proposals for a single tier of local government and continues to influence future local government reorganisation in Devon.

Recommendation(s):

- 1. That Cabinet approves the ‘Reimagining Devon – Believe in Better’ proposal for submission to government as its formal LGR response.**
- 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.**
- 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.**

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In December 2024, the Government published The English Devolution White Paper setting out their intentions for local government in two-tier areas (such as Devon), to be reorganised into a single tier of local government.
- 1.2 In response to an invitation from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, an interim plan for reorganisation across the historic county of Devon through the creation of two new unitary authorities, alongside the retention of the existing Plymouth City Council, was considered by Council at its meeting held on 12th March 2025.
- 1.3 The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution provided feedback on the interim proposal in advance of detailed proposals for local government reorganisation (LGR) being submitted by 28th November 2025.
- 1.4 The Council has undertaken extensive consultation and engagement with our communities and partners to help shape and inform its proposals.
- 1.5 The Leader and Chief Executive have been working with the leaders and chief executives of other Devon councils, supported by KPMG, to develop our proposal for local government reorganisation in Devon - Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better ('the 4-5-1 Proposal').
- 1.6 The 4-5-1 Proposal responds to and complies with the Government's criteria and sets out the best viable option for the residents and communities of Devon as a whole.
- 1.7 This report provides an update on progress and proposes that Council notes and endorses the proposal, for submission to the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government.
- 1.8 As with all previous reports on this topic, members will recall the full background to this item, being covered in detail at the extraordinary meetings of full council on 8th January 2025 and 12th March 2025.

2.0 Progress

- 2.1 In December 2024 the Government published its White Paper setting out its plans for the devolution of powers from Whitehall to local government. Alongside these proposals, they set out their intentions for local government in two tier areas (such as Devon), to be reorganised into a single tier of local government.

- 2.2 On 5th February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to the Leaders of all two-tier and unitary councils in Devon setting out guidance for proposals for unitary government.
- 2.3 The letter set out a requirement for councils in the historic county of Devon (comprising Devon County, Devon districts, Torbay and Plymouth) to submit their interim plans by 21st March 2025, ahead of detailed proposals for LGR being submitted by 28th November 2025.
- 2.4 The Leader and Chief Executive then worked with the leaders and chief executives of other Devon councils to consider proposals that responded to the government's criteria and would work for our communities taking into account geographies, economies and importantly, the ability to continue delivering good quality services to our residents.
- 2.5 On 28th February 2025, the seven district councils in Devon issued a joint statement on devolution and local government reorganisation setting out the intention to work towards the formation of two new unitary councils that combine existing areas as follows:
- A new unitary council combining the South Hams, Teignbridge and West Devon areas with Torbay;
 - A new unitary council including East, Mid and North Devon alongside Torridge District and the City of Exeter; and
 - The retention of Plymouth City Council as a unitary
- 2.6 This proposal has come to be known as the 4-5-1 proposal given the groupings as outlined above.
- 2.7 An interim plan was developed reflecting this agreement which set out a high-level business case to accord with the guidance issued by government in terms of size, working to existing local authority boundaries and viability.
- 2.8 The Council received feedback from Government on and has proceeded to develop our 4-5-1 proposal for local government reorganisation in Devon – 'Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better' based on three unitary authority structures as outlined above.
- 3.0 Our Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation in Devon – Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better
- 3.1 Our 4-5-1 proposal 'Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better' sets out the detailed case for change and is the result of a successful collaboration between the majority (8 of 11) of Devon's Councils, including:
- East Devon District Council
 - Mid Devon District Council

- North Devon District Council
- South Hams District Council
- Teignbridge District Council
- Torbay Council (Torbay has collaborated but are pursuing their preferred option to remain as a unitary authority)
- Torridge District Council
- West Devon Borough Council

3.2 Our 4-5-1 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

3.3 The full 4-5-1 proposal is set out in Appendix A.

3.4 The 4-5-1 proposal represents a bold vision to transform local government and secure a brighter more prosperous future for all of our communities.

3.5 The 4-5-1 proposal has been developed by the collaborating councils with independent, objective support from KPMG and a range of technical experts including Pixel Financial Management.

3.6 The 4-5-1 proposal responds to and complies with the government's criteria and sets out the best viable option for the residents and communities of Devon as a whole.

3.7 Councils have been asked to submit their detailed proposals for reorganisation by 28th November 2025. At the time of drafting this report it is anticipated that alongside our 4-5-1 proposal, further proposals will come forward from Devon County Council, Torbay Council, Plymouth City, and Exeter City Councils respectively, together with requests for the Secretary of State to consider a range of modifications.

4.0 Consultation & Engagement

4.1 The 4-5-1 proposal has been informed by extensive engagement with our local communities.

- 4.2 Over the summer, we formally commenced our engagement with our residents which consisted of an online survey which ran for 16 weeks and attracted nearly 6,000 responses across the Devon districts.
- 4.3 The Leader chose to use his annual State of the District debate, held on 17th September 2025, to raise awareness on this issue, with a specific focus on town and parish councils and how LGR may affect them. This meeting heard from a selection of local councils in Somerset, and all attendees reflected on what had worked well and what had worked less well, in order to learn those lessons for inclusion in our proposals for local and area-based working.
- 4.4 Throughout the development of the 4-5-1 plan, a series of meetings have been held with partner organisations across the entire county, and opportunities have been taken to raise this informally through regular meetings such as the Mid Devon business forum. This culminated in two more structured engagement sessions during the week commencing 3rd November 2025 with both key stakeholders, and the towns and parishes – where we had almost 100 attendees at each.

5.0 Legal Compliance

- 5.1 The 4-5-1 proposal constitutes a compliant proposal prepared in accordance with Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (“the Act”) and the 5th February 2025 statutory invitation from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation for Devon. The proposal has been prepared having 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.
- 5.2 The Act only permits the Secretary of State to invite a local authority to make one proposal.
- 5.3 Once a proposal has been submitted, the Secretary of State may decide to implement it, with or without modification or take no action. The Secretary of State’s powers to make modifications is a wide one, although not so wide as to allow for extensive changes that transform a proposal so that it becomes a different animal.
- 5.4 In developing the 4-5-1 proposal, and given that proposals are constrained to existing boundaries, we have proposed some modifications to the boundaries be considered, should the Secretary of State be minded to exercise his power of modification (referred to as 4-5-1+).
- 5.5 These modifications would expand the Plymouth boundary to that which is recognised in the Plymouth Policy Area. 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.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the submission of the proposal 'Reimagining Devon – Believe in Better' at Appendix A, to request that the Secretary of State considers our proposal as the one best aligned to the government's criteria for the future of Local Government in Devon.

Financial Implications

As set out in the proposal document.

Legal Implications

As set out in section 5 of the report.

Risk Assessment

Local Government Reorganisation is on the council's corporate risk register, updated monthly to reflect the changing nature of risk in this space.

Impact on Climate Change

Local Government Reorganisation provides an important opportunity for service delivery that integrates environmental stewardship, the protection of landscapes and assets and the promotion of key sectors such as clean energy. It therefore has the potential to address both climate and biodiversity objectives and the achievement of a zero carbon future.

Equalities Impact Assessment

This is a proposal that will, if implemented, affect all of our communities. The decision to submit the proposal has no direct equality impacts, however the wider LGR process will lead to a number of impacts on services to our communities, meaning that equality and impacts will need to be embedded in all future service-based decisions.

A general overview assessment of potential equality issues has been produced for the 4-5-1 submission and is included at Appendix B for reference.

Relationship to Corporate Plan

N/A

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

Date: 13/11/25

Statutory Officer: Maria De Leiburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 13/11/25

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director

Date: 12/11/25

Cabinet member notified: YES

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Stephen Walford, Chief Executive

Email: swalford@middevon.gov.uk

Telephone: 01884 255255

Background papers:

Appendix A – LGR Submission: Reimagining Devon – Believe in Better

Appendix B – LGR Equality Impact Assessment