

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

Current Status

- 2.0 In the weeks since submission, discussion has focused on understanding what the next phases of the programme may look like, as well as readying councils for responding to the various government decisions and steps in the process.
- 2.1 At the time of writing this report, council Chief Executives across Devon were due to hold their first meeting post-submission with the government's strategic adviser towards the end of January. Initial conversations have been had around how to start compiling all relevant data on a range of topics on a solution-agnostic basis, in order that we have this ready to go for when the government decision comes on what version of LGR we are to implement (expected around July 2026). Initial discussions on this have been positive with the vast majority of Devon's 11 councils agreeing the benefit of this approach.

The Potential for Scrutiny

- 3.0 The role of scrutiny during the LGR process changes in accordance with the actions and phasing of that (externally specified) timeline. For example, throughout 2025, scrutiny considered reports on the initial approach, the steps being taken to develop the submission, and a further update ahead of submission including incorporating resident sentiment as captured during summer public engagement.
- 3.1 At all times, the committee has been keen to test collaboration – seeking views and input from the Leader and Chief Executive as required, as well as ensuring that the whole membership has visibility and is included in the process. This has been aided by the Leader calling 3 extraordinary meetings of the Council in 2025, specifically to ensure openness and transparency as to the approach being taken and decisions being made.
- 3.2 After final submission, there has been some discussion among committee members about how to best utilise the interest and experience of scrutiny to maximise the effectiveness of the committee with respect to LGR moving forward.
- 3.3 There have been proposals covering a range of different perspectives. These have ranged from ensuring the committee knows what LGR activities are ongoing and what the future programme looks like (recognising that this cannot be a running commentary on all discussions), through to consideration of how the future councils should operate and how they should be structured with regards to directorate and departmental makeup.
- 3.4 The expected elections in May 2027 will see a new cohort of councillors elected to form a 'shadow authority', and it is this entity that will make and take decisions on how the new council(s) are to be structured. At this stage in the process, it is recommended that scrutiny do not invest significant time

in seeking to design the structure of new councils, since this will not be a role for this council.

- 3.5 Areas of potential interest for scrutiny have been captured below, and while this list may not be exhaustive, it is considered a useful starting point for member discussion and debate.

On the nature of LGR progress (Leader and Chief Executive):

- Liaison with other Devon Councils
- Directions or feedback from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
- Provision of information to MHCLG
- Preparation of processes and procedures in advance of any decision on the selected “way forward”
- Timetable/Plan updates

On associated devolution activities:

- Liaison with other Devon Councils
- Liaison with other Councils on devolution ambitions (Cornwall, Heart of Wessex etc)
- Directions or feedback from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
- Provision of information to MHCLG
- Timetable/Plan updates

Current Timelines

- 4.0 The Minister wrote to all Leaders across Devon on 17th December (see appendix A) to thank all councils for their submissions and to set out the expectation that the government will commence its consultation on reorganisation across the remaining 14 areas of England in early February 2026, with the expectation that this consultation will last for 7 seven weeks.
- 4.1 The Minister wrote again to council Leaders on 18th December in relation to potentially postponing elections that were due in May 2026 (see appendix B). However, this does not apply to Mid Devon, as this council’s scheduled elections are not due to take place until May 2027.
- 4.2 While preparations continue for implementation, the next milestone on the process will be to respond effectively to that government consultation. Therefore, scrutiny might wish to consider the council’s draft response to this at the relevant meeting (February or March, depending on final timelines).

Next Steps

- 5.0 If the committee agrees, a draft response to the government’s consultation could be brought to the next relevant meeting, as per 4.2 above.

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:

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

Date:

Statutory Officer:

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: N/A

Performance and risk:

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: N/A

Cabinet member notified: YES

Contact:

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Appendices:

Appendix A – Minister's letter, Devon LGR, 17/12/25

Appendix B – Minister's letter, Devon elections, 18/12/25