

## **AGENDA ITEM No 5**

**NOTES** of the Meeting of the **DEVOLUTION/LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION WORKING GROUP** held at the Council Chamber, Drake Road, Tavistock at 6:00pm on **TUESDAY 10<sup>th</sup> MARCH, 2026**.

**Present:** Councillors S Hipsey, A Hutton, J Moody, P Ward.

**In Attendance:** Councillors Mrs A Johnson (Deputy Mayor), B Smith (Ward Members)

Town Clerk

### **1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Nominations were invited for the Election of the Chairman of the Working Group for the remainder of the Civic Year.

A nomination, duly seconded, was received in respect of Councillor A Hutton.

It was agreed that Councillor A Hutton be appointed Chairman of the Working Group for the remainder of the Civic Year.

### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs M Ewings and G Parker.

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point in the meeting. It was noted that, subject to subsequent deliberations, interests might arise at a later point in proceedings.

### **4. NOTES OF LAST MEETING**

The Working Group received the Notes of the last meeting, held on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2025, which had previously been circulated.

### **5. CONSULTATION BY GOVERNMENT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN DEVON (TAVISTOCK)**

The Working group considered the Report of the Town Clerk in connection with the above, which set out various issues and options in connection with related approaches/associated matters.

There was a consensus that, for the reasons outlined in the Report, rather than seeking to respond upon individual bids it was most appropriate to comment to Government on those principles and practices most directly associated with constructively informing any future locality and Neighbourhood Governance arrangements. Such an approach ensured any response was best

placed to support communities, contribute to effective and convenient local government, and provide meaningful place based governance - whichever Bid was ultimately successful. Attention was drawn to a helpful analysis which had been prepared by the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC), setting out a comparison of related aspects of the various bids submitted to/being considered by Government.

There followed a wide ranging discussion around the potential impacts, including the benefits and drawbacks associated with the range of options available to principal authorities for neighbourhood governance under current legislative arrangements. It was also acknowledged that Government had indicated it would review the statutory position and, accordingly, options might change over time. However, the importance of being able to recognise and grow the influence of Neighbourhood Area Committees which were representative of place and partners, and which centred around democratically elected and accountable Members from the locality, was stressed.

In the ensuing discussion reference was made to, and agreement reached, in connection with the following principles as a basis for response to the Government Consultation and consideration by the Budget and Policy Committee and Council in due course:-

- i) Town and Parish Councils should have the opportunity to be involved in the scoping and identification of boundaries/areas covered for Neighbourhood Area Committees (NAC's);
- ii) Town and Parish Council involvement/representation on Neighbourhood Area Committees should be meaningful and not tokenistic – including equal voting rights and with potential to develop certain appropriate place based decision making (subject to legislation if/as necessary) or quasi decision making functions, with a view to also including participatory budgeting models;
- iii) Town and Parish Councils should have the opportunity, through representation on Neighbourhood Area Committees, to participate in making or meaningfully shaping/influencing decisions of the principal authority that affected the locality – as such NAC's needed to be more than merely a consultation and engagement ('tick box') forum;
- iv) Whilst Neighbourhood Area Committees could include other place based partners they should be elected member led (both unitary and town/parish councillor), reflecting the statutory democratic mandate they hold, and inclusive with direct reporting links to both the principal authority and it's executive functions (i.e. not to a subordinate body);
- v) Linking to (iv) channels of communication from and to Neighbourhood Area Committees should be "two way"- up and down;

- vi) Of central importance to the success of Neighbourhood Area Committees, as well as the activities of divisional members in their local roles, was the availability of appropriately resourced dedicated principal authority Officer support;
- vii) Insofar as asset and/or service transfers to local councils were concerned it was vital that the principle of fair and balanced (albeit not necessarily wholly equal) deals was adopted – ie seeking to ensure, wherever possible, to neither advantage nor disadvantage either participating authority, whilst collaborating to deliver in the interests of both the ratepayer and wider community.

Noted That: it was a matter of disappointment that Town/Parish Councils had not been designated as statutory consultees by Government.

## **6. PRINCIPAL AUTHORITY “COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER POLICY” AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS**

The Working Group considered the report of the Town Clerk in connection with the above. It also received an oral update arising from further correspondence relating to undertakings given by the Borough Council over 6 months and, most recently, a renewed undertaking provided by the Deputy Chief Executive.

In the ensuing discussion reference was made variously to community assets/infrastructure which had previously been identified by the Town Council as of central importance to the sustainability, health, wellbeing and vitality of the Town and the communities it served. Notwithstanding continuing efforts by the Town Council it was to be hoped that these would be acknowledged by relevant partners and any steps necessary to protect them undertaken in a timely fashion. Also that the upcoming replacement of the Joint Local Plan, and any review of the Neighbourhood Development Plan, together with any other available measures of assurance and mitigation would insofar as it was possible, take on board the needs and legitimate interests of the community the respective councils served.

More generally it was noted that in circumstances where predecessor principal authorities did not engage in protecting assets/services prior to reorganisation, then determination of future arrangements would sit wholly with any new successor authority. Beforehand, and necessarily at the point statutory orders were made, it would not be possible (or at least very difficult) for principal authorities to dispose of interests in land.

Reference was also made to what had occurred arising from the introduction of unitary authorities elsewhere in the Country, in both those and other circumstances.

With regard to the Policy for the Transfer of Community Assets as adopted recently by West Devon/South Hams Borough/District Councils it was noted that the document was narrow in scope and neither reflected important aspects of established/good practice applied generally elsewhere in the sector, nor relevant aspects of the applicable legislative framework. In the circumstances, and in view of the position of the Borough Council on related matters, no subject sites were able to be recommended for progression.

The Meeting closed at 7:35pm

Chairman: