

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE
1st SEPTEMBER 2026**

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN DEVON**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider if/how to proceed pursuant on the decision of Government for Local Government Reorganisation in Devon.

2. CORPORATE POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The Principal authority tier(s) represent a critical partner and dependency for the successful delivery of joined up and effective public services – both with the local Council, the third/voluntary, business, community and public sectors more broadly.

3. LEGAL AND RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

A principal authority that is structurally flawed, or otherwise constrained, is unlikely to be able to deliver effective, efficient and economic public services, with consequential adverse impacts upon the community they serve.

4. RESOURCE ISSUES

At this stage none yet known beyond those listed in the body of this report. However, experience locally – such as in Somerset, indicates a correlation between the financial/operating weakness of principal authorities and the extent/timing of the financial and other burdens transferred to local Councils and others.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

There are no issues arising directly in connection with this report at this time.

6. COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES

It is a matter for the Committee and Council as to any view that may be arrived at and how/if to communicate same.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee and Council consider the options as outlined in para's 3.1-3.2 below.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Committee and Council have received various reports/updates over recent months in connection with the progress of Government proposals for the reorganisation of local Government in Devon. The core proposal being to combine County and District functions into a single unitary tier alongside the existing (but now expanded to include Plymouth) Combined Authority.
- 1.2 On 16th July an email was sent to all Councilors advising of the outcome of the Government's deliberations. More detailed information is available at <https://www.futuredevon.org.uk/>

2. CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1 The decisions of Government in this matter relate directly to principal authorities and not the Town and Parish sector. This report is not therefore intended as a review of the cross county decision, but rather to afford a brief comment on that element affecting this community should Committee and Council wish to consider the extent to which Tavistock may consequentially be impacted.
- 2.2 Copies of draft Minutes arising from the deliberations of nearby similar settlements – Okehampton and Totnes are appended for information (Appendix 1) by way of background.
- 2.3 As the Committee will be aware the proposal for the rural Devon authority (ie that including Tavistock) excludes the four largest centres of population – Plymouth, Exeter, Torbay, Exmouth alongside one of the remaining largest – Newton Abbott. There is also absorption by the 3 other unitaries of Dawlish, Teignmouth, Crediton, Ivybridge and Cranbrook, amongst a large number of parishes.
- 2.4 The residual Devon unit stretches from Sidmouth and Seaton in the SE, to Ilfracombe, Bideford/Barnstaple in the North, and Tavistock and Totnes in the SW - looping around two of the other unitaries.
- 2.5 In the circumstances it is self-evident that Devon unitary, as constituted, faces particular challenges including but not limited to:
 - a) The main economic and wealth drivers in the County either sit in or have been reallocated to the other three

metropolitan/urban authorities – ie non tax income streams will therefore likely be disproportionately dependent on charging for Council services or government support (but see (b) below);

- b) After a recent review of the funding formula for rural areas Government has declined to acknowledge the challenges facing rural authorities, so additional/ongoing new Government support is unlikely;
- c) The area covered is geographically, culturally, economically and demographically extensive and diverse, likewise connectivity is highly limited. For example Seaton, Ilfracombe and Dartmouth may share coastal locations, but little else and are barely accessible to one another by public transport there and back in a day. Equally the cultural and economic drivers in those communities vary appreciably;
- d) Perhaps critically the cost of rural service delivery across a sparsely populated and large area will, by definition, be materially greater than in the three other urban centred unitaries. From waste to SEND services, highway maintenance to refuse collection and so on - costs will tend to be greater but income streams less;
- e) Linking to the above the scheme for a Devon rural authority, as designed by Plymouth and Exeter City Councils, fails to acknowledge or understand the characteristics of service delivery and democratic representation in a large, often sparsely populated, unconnected and diverse rural area;
- f) There was iro 69% public opposition reported to the chosen option.

2.6 At heart though the concerns emerging tend to revolve most substantially around real doubts as to financial/economic viability and sustainability for the new authority. Accompanied by the extent to which in shape and form it can effectively represent the interests of all its diverse communities, often sharing little in common, across a very substantial and unconnected area. It is also notable that the bulk of the population sits in the North and East of the area - with potential consequential impacts upon weight of democratic representation and focus.

2.7 It is understood Devon County Council has acknowledged that the proposal is sub-optimal and, because it believes proper process may not have been followed, is considering Judicial Review <https://www.lgcplus.com/politics/governance-and-structure/devon-issues-lgr-legal-challenge-04-08-2026/>

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 If the Committee and Council are reassured that the proposal as adopted by Government for a rural Devon unitary authority provides fit for purpose, effective, sustainable and resilient arrangements for the delivery of services to the residents of Tavistock then it may either seek to commend the proposal, or to receive it and take no further action.
- 3.2 In the alternative, if the Committee and Council have reservations that the proposal as adopted by Government for a rural Devon unitary authority is likely to lead to a material reduction in, or loss of, arrangements for the fit for purpose/effective delivery of services to the residents of Tavistock then it may wish to:
- a) draw its concerns to the attention of the Secretary of State;
and/or
 - b) write to Devon County Council expressing its views on the proposal and its support, in principle, for a Judicial Review by the County Council to test the process¹ by which the decision was arrived at;
and/or
 - c) as a tangible gesture of support in the interests of the community it serves, offer a contribution by way of grant (ie without being joined in the proceedings) to Devon County Council should it proceed with Judicial Review, in a sum of £1,000
- 3.3 The instructions of the Committee and Council are sought.

**CARL HEARN
TOWN CLERK
TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
SEPTEMBER, 2026**

¹ Judicial Review is primarily a test of process and reasonableness in coming to a decision as opposed to whether or not a court agrees with the decision itself. JR is preceded by a necessary preliminary step – the pre-application protocol stage https://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/civil/protocol/prot_jrv#:~:text=The%20letter%20should%20contain%20the,legal%20basis%20for%20the%20claim and requires permission from the Court to proceed.