

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Outline

The Government's English Devolution White Paper and subsequent ministerial letter set out a shift to larger unitary authorities with a guideline population of 500,000+ and asked two-tier areas to bring forward proposals. The aim is simpler structures, better capacity and resilience, and clearer accountability under devolution.

Devon is served by the County Council, eight district councils and two unitary councils (Plymouth and Torbay).

Neither East Devon or Exeter wish to see the whole of Devon served by one unitary council.

The government has made clear that there will be no change to parish/town councils where they currently exist.

Whilst Councils are asking for the public's views, there will be no public vote – the decision will be made by Government.

Time Line and process

21 March 2025: interim plans submitted to Government

28 November 2025: Final proposals due to Government. If approved, legislation would provide for elections to 'shadow' unitary councils, with implementation thereafter.

East Devon District Council proposals

East Devon's preference is to replace the current county/district two-tier system with two new unitary councils for Devon (alongside Plymouth Unitary).

East Devon backs a model widely described as the '1-4-5 plan'.

1. Retain Plymouth as a standalone unitary
2. Create a South Devon unitary (South Hams, Teignbridge, West Devon with Torbay)
3. Create a North East Devon unitary (East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon, Torridge and Exeter).

This would abolish the county/district split and have each new unitary deliver all local services.

EDDC is working closely alongside the other district councils in Devon to refine options consistent with the two-unitary model (the 1-4-5 plan"). Authorities are currently consulting with residents and surveys are open until the 31st August.

(The recording of their presentation on the 26th August should be available and circulated this week.)

Exeter City Council proposals

Exeter City Council has published its preferred plans (but has said it will take into consideration Torbay's proposals).

1. A Greater Exeter unitary based on the city of Exeter and surrounding area expanding the current district council boundary into parishes surrounding the city. This would see the current population of 138,000 expand to around 256,401
2. Retain an extended Plymouth unitary council – serving a population of approx. 301,000
3. A rural and coastal unitary council covering the remainder of Devon – serving a population of approx. 675,000

The proposed expansion would include 15 parish councils in Teignbridge District Council, 6 in Mid Devon District Council and 28 in East Devon including Colaton Raleigh, West Hill, Otterton, East Budleigh, Woodbury, Exmouth and Budleigh Salterton (not Newton Poppleford). This would increase the population to approx. 260,000 (still less than the 500,000 suggested). They are still studying the geography, which could change their proposals.

Exeter are still awaiting data from other councils, and have not yet done the work to ensure that they have a financial and sustainable case. They stress that services would be nearer the communities they serve with their proposals, and that it is not the size of the council that matters but its leadership and delivery of services.

It was made clear that they wanted to work with Parish Councils to deliver services and to implement decisions that would be made by the unitary.

During August/September a 6 week engagement period will take place, with the possibility of personal engagement in districts.

Slides and recording of the presentation made on the 28th August will be made available shortly.

Devon County Council

Advocating for single unitary authority for the entire county of Devon.