

Meeting: Cabinet **Date:** 18 March 2025

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Local Government Reorganisation – Interim Plan

When does the decision need to be implemented? By 21 March 2025 (call-in waived)

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Cllr David Thomas, Leader of the Council,
david.thomas@torbay.gov.uk

Director Contact Details: Anne-Marie Bond, Chief Executive, anne-marie.bond@torbay.gov.uk

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. On 5 February 2025, the Government issued a Statutory Invitation to the Leaders of all of the two-tier councils and unitary councils in Devon to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government in Devon.
- 1.2. As part of the Invitation, the Government has asked that an interim plan should be submitted on or before 21 March 2025 which sets out the progress that has been made in developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance provided.
- 1.3. This report sets out the draft interim plan for consideration by the Cabinet.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1. The proposals in this report help us to deliver our vision of a healthy, happy, and prosperous Torbay by ensuring that we respond to the Government's invitation to submit proposals for a single tier of local government.
- 2.2. The reasons for the proposal, and need for the decision are, to enable Torbay's initial views on future potential local government reorganisation in Devon to be shared with Government and, therefore, for Torbay Council to receive feedback from the Government on the same.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1. That the Chief Executive, in consultation with Leader of the Council, be authorised to submit an interim plan for local government reorganisation impacting on Torbay to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on or before 21 March 2025.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft interim plan for local government reorganisation impacting on Torbay

5. Background Documents

- None

Supporting Information

6. Introduction

- 6.1. On 5 February 2025, the Government issued a Statutory Invitation to the Leaders of all of the two-tier councils and unitary councils in Devon to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government in Devon.
- 6.2. As part of the Invitation, the Government has asked that an interim plan should be submitted on or before 21 March 2025 which sets out the progress that has been made in developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance provided.
- 6.3. Since the invitation from Government was received, the Leader of the Council has been working with the Leaders of all the other authorities in Devon to understand their positions. Discussions have been held internally between the Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet of Torbay Council, as well as with all other members of the Council, our strategic partners within our Place Leadership Board, our Members of Parliament, and with interested members of our community who attended a public engagement event.

7. Options under consideration

- 7.1. The draft interim plan at Appendix 1 to this report sets out four potential options for local government reorganisation and provides the details that the Government has asked to be included in a non-binding interim plan. The Government recognises that the level of detail that is possible at this stage will vary from place to place. The interim plan is an opportunity for the Council to provide the MHCLG with an update on the progress we are making with the options we are exploring.
- 7.2. The options which it is proposed are considered further in developing final proposals to be submitted in November 2025 are:
 - 7.2.1. Torbay Council remains as it is
 - 7.2.2. A new unitary council is created covering Torbay, approximately half of South Hams and most of Teignbridge (i.e. covering the South Local Care Partnership of the NHS)
 - 7.2.3. A new unitary council is created covering the areas of Torbay, South Hams, West Devon and Teignbridge, plus a new unitary council in the east and north of Devon, and Plymouth remaining as is (or with a slightly enlarged border)

- 7.3. A fourth option has been discounted, namely a single Devon unitary authority (with or without Plymouth). It is felt that a unitary authority of that size would be too large for it to be efficient and effective whilst retaining a sense of place and community. This is also a significant risk that those most vulnerable in the Torbay community who rely on crucial services such as adult social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness will be negatively and disproportionately impacted if Torbay becomes part of a single Devon unitary council (with or without Plymouth).

8. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 8.1. The financial opportunities and implications of local government reorganisation in Torbay will need to be considered in full, and with the other authorities across Devon, as the final proposals are developed.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. The invitation from the Secretary of State to submit proposals for a single tier of local government in Devon has been issued under powers of Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

10. Engagement and Consultation

- 10.1. In the limited time between the invitation being received and the deadline for interim plans to be submitted, the Council has engaged with the Place Leadership Board and the Members of Parliament for Torbay. A public engagement event was held on 12 March 2025 with no fewer than 150 attendees.
- 10.2. In accordance with our Community Engagement and Empowerment Strategy and as directed by the MHCLG, in developing final proposals the Council will:
- 10.2.1. Work collaboratively and proactively with the Leaders of the other Councils in Devon
 - 10.2.2. Continue to engage our Members of Parliament
 - 10.2.3. Ensure there is wide engagement with local partners, stakeholders, residents and businesses, as well as with our staff and their representatives
 - 10.2.4. Specifically seek the views of the NHS Integrated Care Board, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Fire and Rescue Authority, South Devon College, Dartmoor National Park Authority and the voluntary and third sector.
- 10.3. The engagement will inform the development of robust proposals. It will also be used to build a shared understanding of the improvements that we would expect to deliver through any reorganisation.
- 10.4. Once the proposal has been submitted it will be for the Government to decide on taking a proposal forward and to consult as required by statute.

11. Procurement Implications

11.1. Not applicable

12. Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

12.1. In developing a proposal, consideration will be given to the impact, if any, on the environment and tackling climate change.

13. Associated Risks

13.1 The risk of not submitting an interim plan is that other councils in Devon may submit plans which impact on Torbay and therefore it is imperative that Torbay Council shares with the Government the potential impacts of local government reorganisation on the communities within Torbay.

14. Equality Impact Assessment

14.1 It is not possible to fully understand the equality implications at present. A completed equality impact assessment will be prepared alongside the proposal.

15. Cumulative Council Impact

15.1 The Council has an ambitious programme of delivery already underway alongside its “business as usual.” The resource implications of progressing the development of proposals for local government reorganisation will need to be carefully managed.

16. Cumulative Community Impacts

16.1 None at this stage but this will be kept under review.