

**Teignbridge District Council
Full Council
27 February 2024
Part I**

**Consultation on the Proposed Devon and Torbay Combined
Authority (Devolution Deal)**

Purpose of Report

To allow members to fully consider the devolution offer and contribute to the public consultation

Recommendation(s)

The Committee RESOLVES to:

- (1) Recommend that Council approves the response (as set out below) to the consultation, and that delegated authority be given to the Managing Director in consultation with the Leader to add to the response if required following district-level briefing by the team at DCC on the 22nd February and the debate at the Full Council meeting.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications in responding to the consultation. However, should the CCA be set up then there may be financial implications, not least because district councils may not be administering the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (or its successor).

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Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from any response to the consultation per se.
Paul Woodhead Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
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Risk Assessment

The proposals contained within the Devolution Deal have the potential to affect how the Council accesses funding moving forward. The lack of formal voting representation on the Combined County Authority adds a potential additional layer of risk to how associated investment decisions are made.

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Environmental/ Climate Change Implications

The Devolution Deal specifically secures additional resources to progress low carbon initiatives.

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Executive Member

Cllr Wrigley, Leader

Appendices/Background Papers

1. Introduction/Background

1.1. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, makes provision for the creation of County Combined Authorities (CCAs) and for the devolution of powers to those Authorities.

1.2. The Levelling Up White Paper set out the range of powers that could be devolved, the scope of which was dependant on what type of governance model was chosen. The authorities in Devon, comprising the eight Districts, Devon County Council (DCC), Torbay Council (TC) and Plymouth City Council (PCC), decided to open up discussions with government over a potential Level 2 devolution deal. PCC subsequently dropped out of the process.

1.2. The Devon and Torbay Devolution proposal being consulted upon is for a Level 2 arrangement which requires the creation of a CCA rather than a Level 3 deal which requires a mayoral model.

1.4. The Devon and Torbay Devolution Deal was approved for consultation by Devon County Council and Torbay by their respective cabinets/executives on 2nd

February 2024. The consultation went live on 12th February 2024. All information can be found either in the reports that went to DCC's cabinet or at the webpage here: <https://www.devontorbaydeal.org.uk/>

1.5. The consultation runs from 12th February 2024 to 24th March 2024.

2. TDC's proposed response;

- We note the county is intending to propose this deal under the process prescribed by statute.

- We support the principles of devolved decision-making and firmly believe that decisions taken in Devon are more likely to be beneficial to the specific needs of the communities in Teignbridge than those taken in Whitehall. However, we have a number of specific concerns that we would urge parties to consider and address as part of any implementation.

- In common with other district colleagues across Devon, we have concerns in a number of specific areas:
 - o UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) – we expect this (or its successor) to continue to be devolved to districts within Devon. We note that there is currently no certainty about any future rounds of the UKSPF programme. However, in line with government commitment to replace lost EU funding, we would expect the shared prosperity fund, or equivalent replacement funding streams, to be devolved from the CCA to district level by default. The remaining CCA remit should be to broker conversations about strategic commissioning of countywide (generic) business support activity, and to maximise the effectiveness of local investment aligned to the economic support activity newly-returning to the county council as part of the winding down of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). However, since the LEP failed on both its democratic mandate and often in its local relevance, we would wish the CCA to set off firmly on the right foot by

committing to retain local delivery methods for business support where this is currently in place via districts.

o Housing empowerment – we expect the CCA to enable and accelerate delivery with and through districts and local housing associations. Much is made of the potential for a shared strategic investment pipeline with Homes England, and while we recognise the potential for shared investment and the need for strategic conversations to deliver this, we would wish to make it clear that districts expect existing housing functions and groupings to be utilised. We specifically would like to ensure that the district councils relationship with Homes England be retained and built upon. The aims of the CCA should be to build on best practice and expertise; to provide a stronger platform and empower the excellent work being done across the Team Devon landscape, not to duplicate or add extra bureaucracy. We understand that this is the intention, however we would wish to be involved more fully in the discussions around ‘operationalising’ the CCA.

o Voting rights and governance – we understand that the government rejected the proposed amendment by the House of Lords to allow district councils to be constituent members of the new Combined County Authorities. We would hope that a more enlightened future government takes steps to amend this. However, in the meantime we would ask that all such opportunities within the law are considered to ensure that districts can have a voice on reserved matter issues. Particularly when many of these are of relevance to districts and existing partnership ambitions are already in place, for example around carbon reduction and the Devon Climate Emergency. We welcome and firmly support the proposal to move ‘Team Devon’ onto a more robust governance footing by converting this to a statutory joint committee in order to inform the voting intentions wielded at the CCA board. However, we regret that such a workaround is necessary and note the policy paradox of government devolution diminishing the voice of local democratic institutions.

o Transport – we recognise that operational highway matters will remain with DCC and Torbay respectively. However, in the duty to produce a joint strategic transport plan across the CCA geography, we would urge inclusion of the district councils in the formulation of this in order to ensure

that vital land-use and housing plans are aligned to transport plans and that sustainable transport options are embedded – both in terms of strategic intent and future investment.

o Community and involvement of local towns and parishes – the voice of the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) is a welcome one within the current 'Team Devon' arena, and we would strongly support the inclusion and recognition of town and parishes in the implementation and operationalising of the CCA. Housing, transport, jobs, skills and sustainability are strategic issues with often local or hyper-local solutions. The CCA should aim to be the bridge that demonstrates strategic intervention and scale, while empowering our communities' ambition and aspiration.

4. Alternative Options

The Council may choose not to respond to the consultation.

5. Conclusion

As the district council is not party to the deal directly with Government a response to the consultation is considered necessary to ensure the views of the district are heard and noted.

The proposed response outlines the common areas of concern shared by the Devon District Councils.