

## Ordinary Meeting of Harberton Parish Council 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024

*This document has been compiled to support Parish Councils consideration of the following agenda item:*

**Item 12 Devon & Torbay Devolution Deal** *Consideration of response to consultation on the Deal and establishment of the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (CCA).*

### What is devolution?

According to information available from the [Local Government Association](#) devolution (in England) is the transfer of powers and funding from national to local government. It is important because it ensures that decisions are made closer to the local people, communities and businesses they affect.

The result will be more effective, better targeted public services, greater growth and stronger partnerships between public, private and community leaders in local areas.

The Government has chosen Devon and Torbay as one of only a small number of local authority areas in the country to form a Combined County Authority (CCA), that will not require an elected Mayor or changes to the current structure of local councils.

Subject to public consultation, the new powers would be devolved to a proposed CCA – a partnership comprising Councillors representing the councils of Devon and Torbay, including District Councils, and representatives from business and education.

DALC is encouraging all its member councils to engage in the consultation and to promote consultation within local communities. The consultation closes on 24th March 2024.

### How could Devon and Torbay benefit from a Devolution Deal?

Devon and Torbay Councils have included the following information on the Devolution Deal website:

Devon and Torbay is a special place with enormous potential in its businesses, people and places. But Devon and Torbay face challenges that impact productivity levels and the ability to grow:

- Productivity lags behind the UK average and requires an 30% increase to close the gap.
- Public spending per person has historically trailed the rest of the UK.
- Rural, urban and the coastal areas suffer from nationally significant levels of poverty.
- Social mobility and youth aspiration and progression are particular areas of concern.
- Young people are leaving the area due to a lack of available housing and attractive employment opportunities.
- There are significant challenges with skills and educational performance and pockets of nationally significant educational need.

Devon and Torbay Councils believe that their proposal for a Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority will help them address these challenges.

## How can you find out more?

- There is a Devon and [Torbay Devolution Deal website](#), with links to the [proposals](#) for the Devolution Deal for Devon and Torbay that could re-draw the future relationship with Whitehall and transfer a range of powers and funding to local democratic control.
- DALC held an event on the 27<sup>th</sup> February where senior representatives from Devon County Council gave a presentation to DALC members to help them better understand the devolution proposals. A question and answer session followed. [A recording of the session has been published on YouTube and can be accessed here](#). The meeting was over 2 hours long, but should you be interested in just viewing the presentation, this is found at the beginning of the recording and **lasts about 30 minutes**.

## What does DALC say about the deal?

Whilst this deal involves highly strategic topics such as education, the economy, housing, transport and more, this is an opportunity for the sector to express its aspirations for the new CCA to engage with parish and town councils, ensuring decision making reflects community need. DALC's own consultation response focuses on governance, decision making, resources and engagement with parish and town councils. See the bulletin below, followed by the full consultation response.



## News E-bulletin

The latest news and information for parish and town councils in Devon

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### DALC responds to Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority Consultation

We have issued our response to the public consultation on the proposed Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (CCA).

DALC's response addresses key themes such as governance and decision-making, resources, and engagement with PTCs and communities.

In terms of governance and decision-making, DALC supports the transfer of functions and funding from central government to local government, advocating for greater local autonomy. We welcome the creation of a democratically accountable body to deliver a devolution deal for Devon, and emphasise the importance of wider democratic involvement and collaborative decision-making.

DALC also raises concerns about resources, highlighting the need for clarity on the short and longer-term resource requirements for the CCA. We stress the importance of sustainable funding beyond the initial government allocation and express reservations about burdening constituent councils with additional financial responsibilities.

Engagement between the CCA and PTCs is another crucial aspect addressed in DALC's response. We emphasise the importance of strengthening relationships between PTCs and constituent councils, advocating for improved recognition and engagement of PTCs as equal partners in local governance.

While acknowledging the evolving nature of the government's devolution agenda, DALC expresses support for the creation of the CCA and its potential to facilitate further devolution opportunities in the future. We advocate for direct access to government funding and enabling powers for PTCs to better serve their communities.

DALC's response underscores the importance of collaborative and inclusive governance structures that empower local communities and ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

As the consultation period progresses, DALC remains committed to advocating for the interests of PTCs and working towards a more inclusive and effective local governance framework for Devon and Torbay.

We encourage all our member councils to engage in the consultation, and to [promote](#) the consultation within your communities. The consultation closes on 24th March 2024. Find out more at [www.devontorbaydeal.org.uk](http://www.devontorbaydeal.org.uk)

Cllr John Hart, Leader of Devon County Council  
Cllr David Thomas, Leader of Torbay Council



29 February 2024

Dear Cllr Hart and Cllr Thomas

## **DEVON AND TORBAY DEVOLUTION CONSULTATION**

We are writing in response to the [draft proposals](#) for a Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority which are currently subject to public consultation.

The Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) is a recognised member and support organisation representing the interests of parish and town councils (PTCs) in Devon. PTCs are the first tier of local government and the closest to our communities, providing our towns and villages with a democratically accountable voice, along with structure and leadership to deliver local services and champion what matters to local people.

PTCs are interested in a range of matters relating to the proposals for a Combined County Authority (CCA) which will be responsible for delivery, implementation, and oversight of a Devolution Deal in Devon. DALC's response aims to reflect the PTC sector as a whole and does not necessarily reflect the views of individual PTCs. The key themes considered as part of this response were: governance and decision-making, resources, and engagement with PTCs and communities.

### **GOVERNANCE AND DECISION MAKING**

DALC is an advocate for greater local autonomy of government powers, funding, and functions, and believes decision-making at the local level achieves better outcomes for communities. In principle, DALC is supportive of the transfer of functions and funding from central government to local government.

DALC believes that democratic accountability is important for the delivery and oversight of government functions. A CCA will provide an accountable body, constituted by representatives nominated by Devon County Council and Torbay Council, providing democratically appointed leadership. DALC welcomes and supports the consensus approach to decision-making, in particular the absence of a casting vote for the chairman. The CCA model is preferable to previous structures, such as the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, which had significant influence over economic development of the area, with lesser democratic involvement.

DALC recognises the importance of wider democratic involvement into the delivery and oversight of government functions. When all tiers of local government work collaboratively, there is greater trust and confidence in each other to deliver their respective functions effectively, independently or in partnership, to meet community needs. We welcome and support proposals to establish a Team Devon Joint Committee, of which DALC would be a member representing the PTC sector. DALC recommends the membership of the Joint Committee includes both CEOs and Leaders of the participating bodies, to ensure democratic and operational input, and all parties to have equal voting rights. DALC calls for its engagement in and/or consultation on the terms of reference of the Joint Committee in future.

DALC encourages the broadening of democratic involvement further by engaging with PTCs directly, particularly on locality/place-based matters. DALC wishes to see further engagement and/or consultation with us regarding engagement frameworks. DALC offers its support to facilitate greater democratic involvement into the CCAs decision making processes. We could, through a seat on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, provide a valuable stakeholder perspective on the effectiveness of how the CCA engages with the PTC sector.

## **RESOURCES**

The proposals suggest the CCA will build on existing structures and expertise. A programme team is identified in the transition arrangements, staffing will be required for the transferred transport functions, and DALC anticipates a few statutory roles such as Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer to manage the CCA's operations. DALC seeks more information of the resource requirements for the CCA in the short and longer term, and how these requirements will be met, especially relating to HR, so the constituent councils staffing is not compromised.

There is concern for the sustainability of the proposed CCA. To be effective the CCA must be adequately resourced in the longer term. DALC understands that £1m has been allocated from government for capacity building up to 2026/27, and the CCA will be unable to raise a precept through council tax. DALC would prefer longer term financial support from government, and/or assurances that the CCA will be able to sustain itself post 2026/27 without significant top slicing of funds intended to support Devon's communities. DALC would not support proposals for the constituent councils to fund the CCA as this would mean additional financial burdens on existing budgets, and ultimately our taxpayers.

DALC is concerned about the short-term nature of government funding, and the risks this presents for delivering longer term objectives effectively. A multi-year funding approach would support the CCA to deliver longer term programmes for the benefit of Devon's communities.

A considerable proportion of the Deal establishes partnerships with government departments and/or other agencies, without additional funding. DALC advocates the importance of partnership working, and the added value which can be achieved through collaboration. DALC recognises that formalising these partnerships through a deal agreement can support the development of new initiatives and projects, which could include further devolution and/or investment/funding in future. In principle, DALC is supportive of these partnerships, but would welcome insight into the CCA's key performance indicators which will be used to assess the effectiveness and success of these relationships as they progress.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

A Devolution Deal between central and local government does not in itself require any particular engagement to occur between the CCA and PTCs. DALC understands the majority of functions devolved to the CCA will be delivered through existing structures within the constituent councils, and/or their partners i.e. housing via district councils, and as such, PTCs can expect engagement to be consistent with current practices, which in DALCs view will be a missed opportunity.

PTCs are a natural focus of public activity and service delivery in their communities and are passionate about tackling local issues. They aspire to deliberate and work in partnership with those bodies who have responsibilities for functions in their areas. DALC is aware there is growing discontent within the PTC sector about the quality of relationships between PTCs and the constituent councils at the current time, citing issues such as: PTCs not feeling recognised or appreciated as the first tier of local

government and a democratic voice for their community and champions for matters of local importance; lack of engagement/partnership working with the constituent councils; and poor communication and information sharing from those councils. The depth of feeling varies between councils, departments, and individual personnel (both councillors and officers).

DALC's aim is to see relationships between the constituent councils and PTCs improved and strengthened, with PTCs recognised as equal partners and valued stakeholders in Devon's local government structure. DALC urges the constituent councils to reevaluate how they engage with PTCs, and consider how PTCs can be involved and communicate their views on matters of importance to their communities. This, we believe, will help build trust and confidence in the new CCA to deliver its ambitions within the Devolution Deal.

DALC expects further engagement and consultation regarding future communication/engagement plans and is willing and prepared to support both the CCA, and the constituent councils independently, to identify and facilitate initiatives to improve their relationships with PTCs.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS**

DALC recognises that the creation of a new CCA is not a one-off event but the beginning of the journey. As such, there is not the detail available yet about the CCAs plans and processes. This makes it challenging to assess what impact the CCA and Devolution Deal will have for Devon's communities. DALC anticipates and will welcome opportunities to engage and be consulted on future plans.

DALC recognises that the government's devolution agenda continues to evolve, and the creation of a CCA creates a structure by which central and local government can work closer together and has the potential to create further devolution opportunities in future. As such DALC supports in principle the creation of a CCA for the potential future opportunities it may bring.

DALC welcomes opportunities to explore further devolution opportunities within our existing local government structure, to empower the first tier of local government which are the councils closest to communities, and strengthen their influence over public service delivery. We advocate for direct access to, and/or devolved government funding and enabling powers for PTCs where they demonstrate clear to benefits communities.

Kind regards



Elizabeth Brookes-Hocking, Chair of the Board of Directors



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