

Totnes and Area Parish Cluster Meeting – 28th July 2026 at 6pm via Teams

Group invitees: Totnes, Dartington, Staverton, Berry Pomeroy, Stoke Gabriel, Rattery, Harberton, Ashprington, Littlehempston, Broadhempston Town and Parish Councils

Attendees:

Name	Role
Catherine Marlton	Totnes Clerk
Cathy Aubertin	Broadhempston Clerk
Edward Vidler	Staverton Councillor
Wendy Bloomer	Staverton Councillor
Rebecca Walker	Chief Exec Devon Association of Local Councils
Tim Bennett	Totnes Mayor / Dartington Clerk
Karen Smith	Staverton Clerk
Christel Goodwin	Dartington Cllr
Graham Bennett	Totnes Traffic and Transport Forum
Mark Eysers	Littlehempston Clerk
Peter Smerdon	Rattery Councillor
Steve Bamford	Broadhempston Councillor
Chris Beavis	Totnes Councillor
Jeff Chinnock	Totnes Councillor
Luisa Auletta	Totnes Councillor
Jacqi Hodgson	Totnes, District and County Councillor
Sarah Collinson	Totnes Councillor
John Cummings	Totnes Councillor
Christel Goodwin	Dartington Cllr

Proposed date of next meeting: Tuesday 8th September at 6pm in Totnes Guildhall

Meeting notes:

- **Local Government Reorganisation Decision and Implications:** Participants discussed the recent government decision on local government reorganisation, expressing disappointment and outlining the challenges and opportunities it presents for town and parish councils, including boundary changes, service delivery, and community identity.
 - **Government Decision Overview:** Catherine and Tim explained that the government has chosen a reorganisation plan that was not the preferred option for most local stakeholders, resulting in disappointment and concern about the impact on community identity and practical service delivery. The group noted that the decision brings unique challenges but also opportunities for collaboration.
 - **Boundary and Community Identity:** Issues were highlighted arising from new boundaries, such as parts of Bridgetown being placed in different unitaries, which complicates grant applications and service provision. The group discussed how fixed geographic boundaries do not always align with residents' sense of community, raising concerns about equitable service delivery.

- **Service Delivery and Funding:** Participants raised concerns about how services like community transport, youth services, and public facilities will be managed across new boundaries, especially given the risk of rural areas being left behind and the challenge of funding these services under the new structure.
- **Sector Advocacy and Information Sharing:** Catherine and Rebecca emphasised the importance of continued advocacy for the town and parish council sector, maintaining open dialogue, and sharing information to ensure local voices are heard during the transition. The group agreed to keep meeting and collaborating to strengthen local networks.
- **Judicial Review and Political Advocacy Efforts:** The potential for a judicial review (JR) to challenge the government decision was discussed, the importance of political advocacy, and strategies for engaging MPs and stakeholders, including petitions and formal council positions.
 - **Judicial Review Process:** Jacqi explained that Devon County Council is preparing for a judicial review, with plans to gather at least 100,000 petition signatures to support the challenge. The group discussed the timeline, noting that preparations will occur in September and the JR is expected to be filed in October.
 - **Political Advocacy and MP Engagement:** Sarah suggested requesting meetings with local MPs and Andy Burnham to highlight the inequities resulting from the reorganisation. Jeff and Steve supported the idea of using the current political window to seek a review of the decision, emphasising the need for transparency and evidence-based policymaking.
 - **Council Position and Formal Responses:** It was felt important that councils place local government reorganisation (LGR) on their next agenda to formally decide their position and preferred outcomes, enabling coordinated sector support for the JR and advocacy efforts. Jacqi confirmed that councils will have opportunities to contribute during September.
 - **Petition and Online Feedback:** Jacqi informed participants about an upcoming petition and an online government page for submitting feedback, urging councils and parishioners to participate before the August 17 deadline (info to follow).
- **Opportunities for Positive Proposals and Sector Collaboration:** The group discussed the need to move beyond complaints and develop positive proposals for local government structure, emphasising sector collaboration, resilience, and the importance of presenting constructive alternatives to government and stakeholders.
 - **Positive Proposal Development:** Graham and Christel encouraged the group to formulate and present positive alternatives to the government decision, referencing the preferred '9-1-1' option that had broad support and would minimise disruption and costs. The group discussed building from the most popular consultation outcome and advocating for it (formal member consideration would be needed). Please note the consultation data I have is below:

All respondents

<i>Proposal</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
3 Unitary (Devon CC)	14678	43%	44%	11%	3%
3 Unitary (District Councils Main)	12981	39%	45%	13%	3%
3 Unitary (District Councils Modified)	14960	27%	57%	13%	3%
4 Unitary (Plymouth and Exeter)	14821	20%	69%	8%	3%
4 Unitary (Torbay)	14047	15%	73%	9%	3%

30. Overall, the responses demonstrate a preference for the 3 unitary (Devon County Council) proposal. 43% of respondents to the 3 unitary (Devon County Council) proposal provided positive responses to the questions and 44% of respondents provided negative responses. 14% were responses of neither agree nor disagree or don't know. The 3 unitary (District Councils Main)

- **Sector Collaboration and Resilience:** Rebecca underlined the importance of forming resilient community groups and maintaining strong, united advocacy for the town and parish council sector, especially as cities and new unitaries may lack experience with parishes. She encouraged sharing feedback and evidence to strengthen sector representation.
 - **Information Sharing and Alignment:** Catherine proposed sharing outcomes from the upcoming Town Council meeting and aligning council positions across the cluster, enabling coordinated responses and advocacy. The group discussed the challenge of slow democratic processes and the need for timely agenda items.
- **Practical Impacts on Service Delivery and Planning:** Attendees examined practical implications of the reorganisation for service delivery, planning, and elections, including changes to boundaries, funding, and the role of town and parish councils in statutory consultations.
 - **Service Delivery Across Boundaries:** in delivering services such as public toilets and car parks that are split across new unitary boundaries, raising questions about responsibility and funding. The group noted that some issues will be decided at higher levels, but local councils must prepare for increased responsibilities.
 - **Planning System Changes:** Catherine, Tim, and Luisa explained upcoming changes to the planning system, including reduced local democracy and fewer applications going before elected members. They emphasised the importance of town and parish councils responding to planning applications and referencing neighbourhood plans to maintain influence.

- **Election Alignment and Costs:** Rebecca confirmed that principal authorities have requested a five-year term for both levels of elections to maintain alignment and avoid increased costs for parish and town councils. This change is expected to be confirmed in the structural change order.
- **Strategic Authority and Regional Mayors:** Brief discussion on the Combined County Authority (CCA) and its role as a strategic authority above the new unitaries, noting that it will remain in place and may be linked to a regional mayor, depending on future developments.
- **Cluster Next Steps:** It was agreed to maintain the current cluster group of town and parish councils (Marldon have stepped away), continue information sharing, and plan for an in-person meeting in early September, focusing on resilience, advocacy, and practical support for members.
 - **Cluster Group Maintenance:** It was proposed to keep the cluster group as it is, with ten councils, to avoid unnecessary change during a period of uncertainty.
 - **Next Meeting Planning:** suggested scheduling the next meeting for early September, preferably in person, and offered to circulate notes, links, and outcomes from the Town Council meeting to keep members informed (date at the start of these notes).
- **Community Engagement:** The importance of clear communication with parishioners about the reorganisation, referencing examples like Ivybridge's explanatory post to prevent confusion and misinformation.
- **Upcoming Public Meetings and Boundary Discussions:** Jacqi, Tim, Graham, and others noted an upcoming public meeting at Berry Pomeroy Parish Council with Cllr David Thomas, leader of Torbay, to discuss boundary issues and potential flexibility, inviting interested members to attend and seek clarification. This is scheduled for 11th August.
- **Joint Local Plan Consultation and Housing Allocation:** Tim and Luisa advised councils to respond to the joint local plan consultation, focusing on principles of housing allocation and considering options like new towns to address high unit targets. Councillor Jacqi Hodgson recommended referencing neighborhood plans to maintain local influence.

Follow-up tasks:

- **LGR Petition and Judicial Review Support:** Monitor for the launch of the Devon County Council petition supporting the judicial review and circulate the petition link to all parishes when available. (Jacqi)
- **Government Decision Feedback:** Compile and share links for submitting feedback on the government's Devon reorganisation. (Catherine)
- **Cluster Group Position on LGR:** Add Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) to the next available council agendas for each parish/town to formally decide their position and preferred alternative and share outcomes with the cluster group. (All Councils)

- **Information Sharing on Council Decisions:** Share the outcomes and any draft wording from the Totnes Town Council meeting on 10th August regarding LGR with the cluster group. (Catherine)
- **Scrutiny Committee Meeting Link:** Obtain and circulate the link to the Devon County Council LGR Scrutiny Committee meeting to the group for observation. (Catherine)
- **Boundary Meeting Clarification:** Confirmation of time for the Berry Pomeroy Parish Council meeting with David Thomas on 11th August. (Jacqi)
- **Cluster Group Next Meeting:** Organise and schedule an in-person cluster group meeting for early September, providing details to all members. (Catherine) – **8th September at 6pm**