

Draft Equality Impact Assessment

Draft equality impact assessment of the proposed Devon and Torbay devolution deal

Service: Performance and Partnerships

Head of Service: Interim Director of Performance and Partnerships

Version / date of sign off by Head of Service: 22/1/24

Assessment carried out by (job title): Head of Policy

1. Description of policy under review

This is a **draft** equality impact assessment of the proposed Devon and Torbay devolution deal.

Devon, Plymouth and Torbay was one of nine areas invited by Government, as part of the February 2022 Levelling Up White Paper, to agree a devolution deal. Plymouth City Council decided on 17 November 2023 to withdraw from the devolution deal. The proposed devolution deal for Devon and Torbay was published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on 25 January 2024 and is available on its website. Further information about the proposed deal is also available at www.devontorbaydeal.org.uk/

The new powers and the transfer of new and existing Government funding included in the proposed devolution deal promise to bring greater control to Devon and Torbay to help tackle local priorities, including the need for: new training and retraining opportunities; improved coordination of public transport; more affordable housing and investment to support local business, green jobs to increase productivity and pay.

Government would devolve the powers and funding to a new legal body established by parliament that brings the members of the existing local authorities together: the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (DT CCA). The members of the CCA would include members of Devon County Council and Torbay Council together with district council member representatives and other stakeholders. The statutory requirements for

implementing the proposed deal include public consultation on a draft proposal to establish the DT CCA and the Council's consent to the secondary legislation implementing the proposed devolution deal.

The Devon County Council and Torbay Council Cabinets will be recommended to carry out a public consultation on the draft proposal to establish the DT CCA from 12 February 2024 to 24 March 2024. The purpose of the public consultation will be to invite views from partners (including district councils), stakeholders and public on why the area is seeking to establish the DT CCA, the benefits it would deliver and how it would operate.

The scrutiny committees' work programme includes a report on the proposed devolution deal to the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee's meeting on 28 March 2024.

A final equality impact assessment will be presented to Devon County Council and Torbay Cabinets and Council in April 2024 alongside an analysis of the results of the public consultation in order that the Councils can consider a final proposal for the establishment of the DT CCA for submission to Government.

The proposed devolution deal includes commitments in relation to:

- Governance.
- Finance and investment.
- Skills and education.
- Housing and land.
- Transport.
- Net zero and climate change.
- Culture and tourism.
- Digital.
- Innovation, trade, and investment.
- Sector development.
- Public service reform.
- Resilience and public safety.

The proposed devolution deal reflects the Levelling Up White Paper's devolution framework Level 2 offer of functions and funding from Government. In summary, the proposed devolution deal includes commitments to:

- The formation of the DT CCA, including the creation of a leadership group led by a nominated chair, to provide overall vision and leadership, seek the best value for taxpayer's money, and be accountable to residents.

- New powers to better shape local skills provisions to ensure these meet the needs of the local economy. This will include devolution of Adult Education functions and the core Adult Education Budget, Funding for Free Courses for Jobs, and the opportunity to provide input into Local Skills Improvement Plans.
- £16 million of new capital funding in the current Spending Review period (i.e. to March 2025) to support the delivery of local housing priorities, drive Net Zero ambitions and support green skills capacity, and accelerate wider low carbon business transition across the Devon and Torbay area. This investment is subject to agreement of business cases.
- Greater collaboration between the DT CCA and Homes England to reduce the barriers to affordable housing delivery, regeneration and housing growth – with a particular focus on rural and coastal communities. By combining skills and capacity, the DT CCA and Homes England will develop a shared development pipeline, underpinned by a clear action plan, and explore ways to support the delivery of that pipeline via current and future national housing programmes.
- Agreement from Government to discuss the recommendations of the Devon Housing Commission.
- New powers to improve and better integrate local transport, including the ability to introduce bus franchising subject to approval from the Secretary of State for transport, and control of appropriate local transport functions e.g. responsibility for an area-wide local transport plan.
- Subject to funding, policy and delivery considerations at the next Spending Review, UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) planning and delivery at a strategic level from 2025/26. In carrying out this role, the DT CCA will engage all district councils and other local partners to ensure that the needs of residents can be effectively addressed.
- The integration of the functions of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership held by Devon County Council and Torbay Council into the DT CCA, alongside the provision of a strong and independent local business voice which informs local decision making and strategic economic planning.
- A commitment to developing, in partnership with the Government, an arrangement which ensures close cooperation with the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- A clear role for Devon and Torbay in local resilience and civil contingency planning, preparation, and delivery.

2. Proposal, aims and objectives, and reason for change or review

The decisions which are made by the DT CCA could result in different impacts on different communities/protected characteristics and to examine what these might be, the DT CCA will need to develop its own processes for meeting the Public Sector Equality Duties, including by adopting a clear process for demonstrating that it exercises due consideration of the potential impacts when making decisions and allocating resources.

Respondents to the public consultation will be invited to provide data about protected characteristics and a final equality impact assessment will be prepared and made available in April 2023 when Torbay Council and Devon County Council consider the final proposal.

3. Potential impacts of the proposed devolution deal on equality

3.1 Overall potential equality impacts

The proposed devolution deal will affect everyone who visits, lives or works in Devon and Torbay.

The proposed devolution deal will improve access to high quality adult education which can have a fundamental impact on the life chances of people with protected characteristics – particularly people from ethnic minority groups, disabled people, women, and older people.

Access to adult education is vital to support social mobility, entrepreneurship and career progression. The proposed devolution deal will enable residents, particularly those who experience the greatest barriers, to access the education they require in order to build the lives they want to lead and fulfil their potential. Younger people in Devon and Torbay– and people with all other protected characteristics - cite access to career opportunities as an important priority. Funding made available through the proposed devolution deal would provide an opportunity to increase higher paid jobs and retain talent in Devon and Torbay, to create a place where everyone can see a positive future, where they want to stay, live and work.

The proposed devolution deal would provide an opportunity to empower residents with protected characteristics to be in control of their lives and influence decision making. Devolved control on funding and decision making could lay the foundations to enable service planning and strategy to better respond to communities' need. This would allow also more locally focused solutions to priorities and planning that is led and driven at a local level.

People with protected characteristics cite access to affordable housing as a vital priority. Funding made available through the proposed devolution deal provides an opportunity to support the development of affordable housing.

The proposed devolution deal creates new opportunities to better connect people and places which would have a positive impact for all residents with protected characteristics, who are at greater risk of social exclusion and isolation.

3.2 Protected characteristic: age

The proposed devolution deal has potential positive impacts on younger people and older workers in traditional forms of employment. Investment in the local economy, in skills and retraining will enhance qualification levels, access and suitability for employment, result in a workforce with the right skills for the region to compete successfully with others in the future, and in turn attract more investment.

Improving transport and connectivity benefits many communities and can be crucial to enable people to travel for work, education and to access services.

No specific decisions have yet been made about where investment will occur to generate employment opportunities or in education and improving skills. The DT CCA would need to establish mechanisms for considering and ensuring that investment is distributed to best effect.

3.3 Protected characteristic: disability.

The proposed devolution deal is an opportunity to integrate disability access considerations into core growth, infrastructure, transport, development and regeneration projects – accelerating progress on access for disabled and older people and addressing persistent barriers to participation. Accessibility of the built environment and transport is highlighted as one of the top priorities to achieve disability equality.

The supply of accessible housing for disabled people remains limited. Specially built or adapted housing can be more expensive, whilst many disabled people may have lower incomes or fewer resources with which to afford this more expensive housing. Within the proposals, any opportunities to increase the supply of affordable and rented accessible housing could have an important positive impact for disabled people and carers.

3.4 Protected characteristic: race and culture.

The proposed devolution deal has the potential to offer improved opportunities to people from the different communities which make up the area's population. This is especially the case with the proposals around employment and skills, support to businesses and

investment, where opportunities could be generated. The proposals may also provide support to people seeking to expand or improve their skills and qualifications, and thus progress or improve their earnings potential. This is of course dependent upon opportunities.

3.5 Protected characteristic: sex and gender identity and reassignment.

The proposed devolution deal has the potential to address inequalities in employment opportunities including the gender pay gap. The success of the DT CCA in addressing these issues would depend on more detailed plans and decisions made around skills investment and training, how women are supported into employment and older men to retrain. Lower earnings levels can also impact on the ability of households to access home ownership, including affordable housing and housing in the private sector.

3.6 Protected characteristics: religion & belief and sexual orientation.

The proposed devolution deal will not have direct impacts on people on the grounds of religion & belief or sexual orientation.

4 Stakeholders, their interest and potential impacts

If the proposed DT CAA is established and the deal implemented, equality impact assessments will be undertaken at the design stage of all investment, strategic planning and commissioning decisions. This would enable equality impacts to be assessed and taken into account.

The DT CAA could consider how to establish a gender balance of its membership. The DT CCA could have a dedicated Diversity Champion: a member with a specific role for ensuring equality and diversity is at the heart of Combined County Authority decision making.

5 Description of consultation process and outcomes

This is a draft equality impact assessment of the proposed devolution deal. It is proposed that an eight-week public consultation on the proposed DT CCA and deal is carried out between 12 February 2024 and 24 March 2024 to enable partners, stakeholders and anyone with an interest to comment.

The public consultation will specifically invite respondents to provide views on:

- The extent to which they agree or disagree that locally elected representatives should have greater control of decisions and funding affecting Devon and Torbay through the creation of the Combined County Authority.
- The relative importance of what the CCA would deliver across the key priority areas if the proposal is approved.
- The extent to which they agree or disagree that the powers and funding set out in the proposed deal would help the proposed Combined Authority deliver the priorities for Devon and Torbay.

A final equality impact assessment will be prepared following the public consultation for consideration by Devon County Council and Torbay Council in April 2024.

The Devon Equality Reference Group supports the County Council's work on equality and diversity by providing advice, feedback, ideas and scrutiny. The ERG members are drawn from the voluntary and community sector are independent of the County Council and Service Level Agreements are in place. The ERG's views on the equality impacts of the draft proposed will be invited in order to inform the final Equality Impact Assessment.