

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution

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Leader of the County Council

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Dear Minister,

In response to the Local Government Reorganisation Statutory Invitation you issued on 5th February 2025 to all Councils across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, I am seeking clarity on the approach required for submitting interim plans, and the status of these plans. We have engaged with your department representatives and attended national and local webinars where a number of significant updates have been provided, and we have raised questions. To date there has not been any formal statement in support of these updates or responses to some questions we have raised.

I am supportive of the concept of moving to a Unitary Council(s) structure where it can realise financial sustainability and improved high quality services. This however can only be achieved where there is sufficient analysis, evidence and data to support decisions, coupled with effective and formal engagement with residents and communities. We will not have received or evaluated by 21st March significant financial data, evidence and analysis, or analysis of potential impacts on people services including adult and children's social care, SEND and education.

I have set out below the key areas I would like to have greater comfort on to ensure that the County Council has all available details to make its interim plan submission. You will be aware that there are County Council elections in May, and our pre-election period starts on 25th March. To ensure good and compliant governance the outgoing administration should not commit the new administration to specific options and this is important context for the points I raise. Your assurance on the following points is therefore critical.

1. We have been informed that the interim plan is not a decision point and the County Council is required to set out its progress and current thinking not defined options, should the analysis be available. Your Government will provide feedback on the interim plan and not 'knock-back' at this stage.
2. Each Council can submit a separate interim plan when there is no overall consensus, based on the work to date, and no requirement for one submission containing several options is required.
3. In a separate interim plan from the County Council, it is accepted there is much work still to do, and we can set out the options being explored rather than specify a preferred option(s)
4. A new Council coming into effect in May can change its position and can re-engage with your department to explain its new position.

5. The time available to provide interim plans is not sufficient to have completed any meaningful or formal consultation with residents and stakeholder on ideas being considered, and as such the Council will not be placed at detriment for not having had sufficient time, or democratic mandate to develop firmer proposals.
6. Capacity funding will be made available to local authorities.
7. There is no weighting applied to the criteria set out in the Statutory Invitation
8. No template is being provided by your Department for the Interim Plan

I am meeting with Leaders across Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council and the 8 District Councils spanning Devon and am engaging with Members of Parliament, businesses, Police, the ICB, education providers, National Park Authorities and the Devon Association of Local Councils. The stage we are at means these sessions and conversations remain high level. We have committed to sharing our financial analysis and impact on People Services, once it has been received and considered.

My commitment is to develop the best solutions for all Devon residents, and I look forward to your reply and clarifications to the points above to achieve this by working across national and local government.

I would appreciate a response by 14th March in advance of the publication of our Council paper.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor James McInnes
Leader of the County Council

c.c. Will Garton, Director General for Local Government, Growth and Communities
Catherine Turner, Local Government Engagement, South West Lead