



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our reference: MC2025/06318

Cllr James McInnes
Leader of the County Council
County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
EX2 4QD

13 March 2025

Dear James,

Thank you for your email of 25 February regarding local Government reorganisation.

As you know I wrote to the leaders of all councils in Devon, Torbay and Plymouth on 5 February to invite you to work together to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation, and have requested that for 21 March councils produce an interim plan which sets out progress with this work.

Our officials met following the issue of this invitation for proposals, to discuss the next steps and process. I have responded to the questions you have raised in turn below:

Interim Plans

1. You asked if interim plans are a decision point. Interim plans are not final proposals and therefore are not a decision point. Interim plans should capture progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and demonstrate how councils are working together. The plans serve as a check-in point to show direction and momentum. We will provide feedback on interim plans, to support further work finalising proposals but we will not rule out options at this stage as this is for councils to continue to discuss.
2. You asked if each council can submit a separate interim plan when there is no overall consensus. The expectation is that each area works together to submit one interim plan. The plan may describe more than one potential proposal for the area if there are several options under consideration by different councils, or where there is no consensus.
3. If it has not been possible for all councils in an area to hold these discussions before 21st March, it may be that for practical reasons a council decides to submit a separate interim plan. Under such a scenario, the interim plan should outline the steps necessary to establish arrangements that ensure all councils remain engaged in the discussions, ensures all councils can consider the options and allow for evidence to be provided on how these criteria are met.

4. You asked if councils can set out the options being explored, rather than specifying a preferred option(s). It is acceptable for councils to set out different options being explored at this early stage, and it will be important where possible to provide a comparison of those options against the criteria with available evidence. Interim plans do not need to indicate a preferred option at this early stage. We also recognise that each area will be at different stages of developing plans for unitary local government and therefore the level of detail will vary.
5. You asked if a new Council coming into effect in May can change its position and re-engage with the Department to explain its new position. We understand that at this point in the process, decisions being taken locally are not on the final proposals themselves, and as such the time between March and November will be spent refining proposals for the Government to formally consider, as well as engaging with the Department as these proposals evolve.
6. You asked if a lack of formal consultation will be detrimental to the development of proposals. There is no expectation for councils to formally consult on interim plans and councils should only include a summary of what local engagement has been undertaken at this early stage and any views expressed, along with your further plans for wide local engagement with local stakeholders and public service providers, to help shape your developing proposals.

Capacity funding

7. You asked if capacity funding will be made available to councils. In my previous letter to councils, I was clear that I intend to provide some funds for taking forward any proposal, and I will share further information later in the process.
8. Interim plans should set out indicative costs of implementing proposals and standing up an implementation team, so we can better understand what support councils need to implement proposals.

Weighting

9. You asked if no weighting will be applied to the criteria set out in the statutory invitation. In the letter inviting proposals for unitary local government, we have set out guidance on the criteria for proposals for unitary local government. These criteria are not weighted, and proposals will need to evidence how these criteria are met in the round, across the area.
10. It is to the area to ensure that relevant representations and evidence are considered in their final proposal. Councils should continue to follow the guidance and criteria set out in the statutory letters, published in Annex A.

Template

11. You asked if there is a template provided by the Department for interim plans. There is no template for the interim plans. It is up to local areas to decide how they wish to

present their initial thinking, and we understand that the level of detail that is possible at this stage may vary from place to place. We have not prescribed a format for submission of interim plans, as we know from our discussions that areas are at different stages of delivering proposals and this enables councils to update us in a way that takes account of local circumstances.

I remain grateful for your commitment to this process and also for the work being done locally to coordinate meetings across the area and progress with developing these proposals.

Thank you again for writing to me on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim McMahon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

JIM MCMAHON OBE MP

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution