

Proposed Civic Agreement between the Torbay, Plymouth and Devon Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Assembly and Devon County Council

Report of the Head of Communities

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1) Recommendation

That Cabinet be asked to approve the proposed Civic Agreement.

2) Introduction

Devon has had a long history of charitable activity and philanthropy and the county has an innovative, creative and world renowned social enterprise sector. The levels of participation in volunteering and community work in Devon have always been amongst the highest in the UK and in time of both crisis and celebration, local communities have worked together to support and connect with each other.

The Council has worked alongside the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector throughout its history, and currently commissions charities and not for profit organisations to deliver across its areas of responsibility from providing care to vulnerable people, youth work and adoption, from libraries to community transport.

During the recent pandemic the local VCSE demonstrated its agility and innovation in providing vital support to the most vulnerable in Devon and in turn demonstrated the increasing reliance the state has on the sector and on the resilience of local people and communities.

In working together, the Council and representatives from the sector developed key learning and strong partnerships from the 'recovery' phase following the pandemic. This included the development of recommendations around the sector and our respective relationships in responding to key issues across Devon. Leaders from the VCSE began to develop arrangements to form an 'Assembly' to act as a strong, cohesive and coordinating voice for charities and community focussed organisations locally.

The Torbay, Plymouth and Devon Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (TPD VCSE) Assembly, established in 2022, is a broad based inclusive and shared collaborative model where people, communities and organisations can contribute and engage in the way they want to. Everyone from across Torbay, Plymouth and Devon (TPD) from an organisation within the VCSE, who wants to be included, will be included.

The Assembly provides network support necessary to create a fluid pool of people and organisations, with a broad range of skills, expertise, innovative solutions and lived experience. The Assembly can fully engage in, inform, and influence strategic partnership discussions, co-design of services, policy development, co-commissioning and joint leadership and decision making. The Assembly provides a place where anyone can find out what is happening across local partnerships. (Please refer to Appendix 1 for further information about the Assembly's reach and governance arrangements)

The Assembly's network encompasses a wide range of different types of organisations (infrastructure, larger County-wide, small community groups, user-led organisations, Healthwatch etc) from across all the geographical areas of Devon (Torbay, Plymouth, North Devon, Exeter, South Hams, East Devon, West Devon, Mid Devon, Teignbridge and Torridge).

The Assembly works across all areas of need including health and social care, debt and poverty and across all ages.

The Assembly is fully committed to equality and diversity, and aims to ensure that the relevant VCSE organisations are involved at the earliest possible stage.

In order to keep administration to a minimum, whilst still ensuring good governance and being fully inclusive and collaborative, the VCSE Assembly have a simple structure consisting of:

- 1 An Executive Committee
- 2 VCSE network meetings
- 3 VCSE Assembly Themed Hub meetings.
- 4 A proposed Annual Conference.

An Independent chair (3.5 days per month) was appointed nine months ago to provide additional Strategic Leadership capacity. The Chair is accountable to the Assembly Executive Committee and ultimately to the wider VCSE Network.

3) Proposal

Devon County Council and the Torbay, Plymouth and Devon Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Assembly now wish to form a shared Civic Agreement to set out a commitment to work in partnership to better understand and collectively respond to some key challenges and opportunities for Devon in the years ahead.

The agreement recognises the fundamental role that both the VCSE and the Council (alongside key partners) have in collaboration, co-design, and sharing resources to generate greater benefits and improved outcomes for Devon, its people and its communities.

The agreement will set out shared strategic priorities, principles and ways of working. These will include quarterly communication between Chair/Assembly Executive and DCC Officers/Senior Leadership Team and Elected Members; Topic specific joint sessions around priority themes and an annual joint learning/development event, including elected Members.

Critically, the agreement will be underpinned by an annual and mutually agreed plan of activity around specific areas of focus and priority, which will include key priorities for the Council.

Partnership arrangements will be established with designated lead representatives from each organisation to finalise and drive activity.

This agreement will deliver long lasting value, benefits and learning for both organisations and bring opportunities and structure for staff and Members engagement and activity and learning.

4) Options / Alternatives

There is no alternative recommendation for the Civic agreement.

The Civic agreement does not preclude the Council entering into other agreements or engagement with other partners or sectors.

5) Consultation and Engagement

No consultation has been commissioned. However this document has been co-produced by officers of the Council and the Executive members of the Assembly.

The Torbay, Plymouth and Devon Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Assembly is made up of over 250 independent VCSE Organisations alongside 60 public sector organisations who wish to work collaboratively with them.

6) Strategic Plan

This proposal aligns with the vision and priorities in the Council's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 and has the potential to enable delivery of aspects of the Council's principles around good governance, decision making and partnership. This proposal will specifically support the aims to:

- Continue to support our vibrant community and voluntary sector
- Work with voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations on shared plans and aspirations around recovery

7) Financial Considerations

The Agreement will have no specific financial implication on the organisation. It will need some administrative support and limited activity from wider officers. Any indirect costs should be seen alongside the opportunities to improve delivery and efficiency of services; the potential to secure joint bids for funding and wider public investment.

8) Legal Considerations

The Agreement is a non-legally binding Memorandum of Understanding. The Civic agreement does not preclude the Council entering into other agreements or engagement with other partners or sectors.

9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)

The Agreement as a memorandum of understanding will be carbon neutral. In progressing this proposal, an Impact Assessment has been prepared which will be circulated separately to Cabinet Members and available on the Council's website.

10) Equality Considerations

In progressing this proposal, an Impact Assessment has been prepared which has been published on the Council's website and will be provided to Cabinet Members.

The report considers the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty that requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding in relation to the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (for employment), pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation).

The signing of this agreement could in turn lead to significant positive impacts for all citizens through better sharing of information and insight and joint working to tackle specific issues, particularly those impacting people from groups with protected characteristics.

Members will need to consider the Impact Assessment for the purposes of this item.

11) Risk Management Considerations

Given its nature, the Agreement does not present an additional risk to the Council. However the successful delivery of the agreement's aspirations around stronger partnerships and improved working could help to mitigate elements of some of the Council's risks around sustainability, sufficiency and resilience.

12) Summary

The proposal will help to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan priorities in developing its working with a key partner in Devon; will provide value for money in developing innovative solutions and learning to increase efficiency, effectiveness of services and to mitigate risks; and develop capacity and connections between the Council and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Devon.

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Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality
Councillor Roger Croad

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Nil

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