

DRAFT – v 0.4 December 2024

Civic Agreement

Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC)

And

Devon County Council (DCC)

Date 03/12/24

DALC-DCC Civic Agreement DFT v0.4

Introduction

Devon County Council (DCC) and the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) recognise the critical role of precepting councils, at all tiers of local government, in local service delivery and place-shaping. With a shared commitment to vibrant local governance, both parties aim to foster good relations and collaboration between our organisations, between councils, and the elected members, officers, and communities they represent.

Both organisations recognise the value of collaboration and partnership to enhance local governance, community development, and service delivery; and for achieving our shared goal for Devon to be a thriving, sustainable, and prosperous place to live, work and visit.

This agreement formalises previously ad-hoc collaborative activity, introducing a framework to inform, plan, facilitate, and implement strategic activities to achieve jointly agreed outcomes. As a result, engagement between DCC and DALC will be more efficient and effective, with more informed decisions taken, and action implemented on key strategic challenges and opportunities.

Vision and purpose

Our vision is of vibrant local governance at all tiers, with robust leadership, informed and decisive action, and effective partnerships, proactively addressing key strategic issues within Devon's communities. Within this framework, we envisage active community engagement and high levels of civic involvement, where councils earn trust and respect from the communities they work alongside and represent.

Together we will:

1. Recognise and respect the pivotal role of local councils, of all sizes, in enhancing community well-being by fostering local governance, facilitating community involvement, and developing services that meet the unique needs of their localities.
2. Seek to develop a strong relationship and partnership, working together to share knowledge, data and resources, to support mutual learning and joint activity.
3. Develop civil society to be ambitious for people to thrive in Devon.
4. Work together and with others, to identify needs and address shared challenges.
5. Develop understanding and solutions to help deliver better outcomes for people and develop greater whole society resilience.

Guiding Principles

Both organisations agree to work to the following guiding principles:

- **Mutual respect and trust.** Recognise and respect the distinct roles, responsibilities, and expertise of DCC, DALC and local councils. Improve relationships for councillors and officers by fostering a culture of trust and understanding through transparent, reliable, and consistent practices.
- **Open communication.** Ensure regular, open and honest communication, and identify opportunities to enhance communication between DCC, DALC and local councils and the communities they represent, on issues and challenges of mutual interest and relevance.

- **Information sharing.** Embrace opportunities to connect, to share information, data and insights promptly to address Devon's challenges and support informed decision making.
- **Collaboration.** Engage in joint planning and decision making. Collaborate on the development and implementation of projects, policies and approaches, leveraging the strengths and expertise of each organisation, providing mutual benefit and a clear route to local impact.
- **Community centric.** Actively engage the public and community realm to identify and prioritise needs and aspirations, and support engaged and informed learning and understanding.
- **Accountability.** Define clear roles, responsibilities and expectations for each partner to ensure accountability through any joint work. Monitor and adjust where necessary.
- **Flexibility and agility.** Be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances, needs and opportunities. Encourage creative and innovative problem solving to address community challenges.
- **Continuous learning.** Encourage a culture of reflective practice and continuous learning, creating capacity for both organisations to enhance knowledge, skills and effectiveness.

Strategic Aims

- **Support councils:** Strengthen councils' capacity and skills, promote effective governance, and encourage innovation.
- **Foster knowledge sharing:** Promote peer learning, best practice dissemination, and collective problem-solving.
- **Encourage community engagement:** Champion community participation in decision-making processes.
- **Advocate for communities:** Represent the interests of communities to policy and decision-makers.
- **Build strategic partnerships:** Develop alliances between local councils, principal authorities, and other stakeholders.

Follow-on Resourcing and Action

Limited administrative support will be required from both partners. As relationships continue to develop, new issues and initiatives will emerge, necessitating agreement on how these are to be resourced, including any joint funding bids. The following will be implemented:

- Designated leads will be identified to coordinate actions and communications, and facilitate and oversee this agreement.

- Six monthly communication updates from DCC Cabinet/CEO/Senior Leadership Team & Heads of Service to DALC Officers / Members and vice versa will follow. Updates will have initial focus on forward plans and issues of priority.
- Appropriate senior (Political and Officer) representatives from each organisation will meet six monthly (or upon joint review at agreed intervals thereafter) to discuss ongoing activity, joint priorities, forward plans and identify opportunities to work together on matters of joint concern, as well as reviewing this agreement.
- Development of a Joint Working Group of DALC/DCC Senior Officers/Elected Members to
 - explore further identified strategic challenges of joint interest and priority (utilising when right to do so the DALC Councillor Panel (consultative group for rapid responses) and /or DCC Extended Leadership sessions or similar).
 - co-design/produce a joint annual work plan of joint strategic challenges and priorities. Allowing new issues of joint concern and priority to be included in the plan, progress to be monitored as well as enabling the review and updating of existing agreements and practice.
 - Act as ongoing, open and honest critical friends to each other. Raising issues of importance as they arise i.e. service performance or new/emerging issues or priorities. Identifying barriers to community led action and facilitating problem solving and joint action/response.
- Promote DALC Connect/Conference events to DCC officers as a route for engagement and to test development and thinking, such as recent activity already undertaken with DCC Highways. Likewise, to promote DCC Extended Leadership events or similar with DALC officers and senior executive members as a reciprocal route for engagement and to test development and thinking.
- At least one annual joint learning/development event (utilising the DALC Annual Conference or an appropriate DCC event, e.g. Extended Leadership event or similar), where relevant DCC/DALC senior officers and members are invited/involved; and where our relationship, learning, joint working and achievements are reviewed.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In addition to the Joint Working Group mentioned, the agreement will be monitored and evaluated by a combination of relevant DCC members, officers and commissioners, and separately with the Council through scrutiny processes, and via the DALC governance processes with its membership.

The partners recognise the value of both quantitative and qualitative evaluation when assessing the impact of this agreement. To this end both DCC and the DALC will collaborate in the development of appropriate case studies and reports which can act as an aid to the sustainability and spread of best practice.