

NOTES of the Meeting of the **DEVOLUTION/LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION WORKING GROUP** held at the Council Chamber, Drake Road, Tavistock at 6.00pm on Monday 3rd March, 2025

Present: Councillor P Ward (Chair)
Councillors A Hutton, Mrs A Johnson

In Attendance: Town Clerk, General Manager

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Nominations were invited for the election of Chairman of the Working Group for the remainder of the Civic Year.

A nomination, duly seconded, was received in respect of Councillor P Ward.

AGREED THAT Councillor P Ward be elected Chairman of the Devolution/Local Government Reorganisation Working Group for the remainder of the Civic Year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors J Moody and R Poppe.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs A Johnson declared a personal non-prejudicial interest by virtue of membership of West Devon Borough Council.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Working Group noted the Terms of Reference as set by Council, namely:-

“Meeting on an informal basis, to consider the implications of and preparation for the future impacts of the implementation of the White Paper, with particular regard to the reorganisation of Local Government in Devon and how best to represent the interests of the rate payers and community of the town”.

5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN DEVON

The Working Group proceeded to consider the report of the Town Clerk (Appendix 1) in connection with the above.

The report included the background to, and a commentary on, the current position with regard to emerging arrangements for the proposed reorganisation of Local Government in Devon, including implications for Town & Parish Councils and, more particularly, Tavistock.

There was a discussion regarding impact, the vision (what the Council might want to achieve and why), an emphasis placed upon community and stakeholder benefit, approaches appropriate to the assessment of priorities, and the underlying principles which might underpin evidence-led, plan-based and equitable arrangements for all in the interests of the community.

Reference was also made to a joint statement from some Devon District Councils (i.e. not including Torbay or Plymouth Unitary Councils or Exeter City (District) Council) indicating preferred arrangements (amongst the signatories) for Local Government reorganisation in Devon.

Those comprised two potential new Unitary Authorities to cover the civil area of the County. Insofar as Tavistock/West Devon Borough Council were concerned the applicable proposal being a combination of South Hams and Teignbridge District Councils, together with West Devon Borough Council and the Torbay unitary.

Devon County Council had previously indicated a preference for a single county-wide unitary authority. It was also noted that there were settlement areas associated with the outskirts of Plymouth, - such as Woolwell and Sherford, which presently fell within the South Hams but which might, subject to agreement, appropriately be incorporated within a wider footprint for the City Unitary.

Reorganisation presented the potential for both opportunities and threats to services and assets at the locality level, some of which might be capable of anticipation, others less so (for example in another part of the country the new unitary had decided that it could discharge its statutory duty to provide a library service by retaining just one library in the county town - then offering all other libraries up to be operated by town/parish councils, or otherwise closed). Accordingly the consensus was that, in the circumstances prevailing in Devon, it was incumbent on the Town Council working with principal authority partners, to do all it could to "future proof" resilience and sustainability for the town.

If at all possible, those arrangements should be developed and agreed before reorganisation took place, reflecting the depth and breadth of local knowledge in the participating authorities currently which might not subsist after change. In doing so consideration would appropriately be given with partners to how/when best to undertake communication and engagement with the community.

To support an evidence led approach value was attached to the potential for asset and service mapping of the activities of principal authorities (West Devon Borough Council and Devon County Council) in the area, and information would be sought from them accordingly. It was also acknowledged that, even before such an exercise were undertaken, there were a number of aspects which could be readily identified including, but by no means limited to, Goose Fair/Bedford Square operating arrangements, public conveniences, Crowndale Playing Fields,

Meadowlands/The Wharf/Courtgate, public car parks, principal authority leasing of assets on Town Council land, operating bases and services currently operated by West Devon Borough Council delivered under contract to Devon County Council etc. Success very much depended on constructive collaboration and co-production with principal authority partners willing to engage in advance of reorganisation. Fairness suggested a shared operating principle, namely - to seek to avoid the community losing what it already had and valued, whilst avoiding the rate payer being required to pay for it twice (i.e. to avoid "double taxation"). That did not mean that there might not be some additional costs for the Town Council, but that an equitable balance should be struck between devolution of expense incurring vis a vis income generating activities. That avoided disadvantaging either participating local authority partner, whilst preserving services/assets for the community.

It was acknowledged that discussions with the County Council would necessarily be limited in the near term by purdah and, subject to the outcome of the local Government elections on May 1st, the composition of the new administration. Contacts in advance would therefore be on informal basis between officers.

AGREED THAT the Budget and Policy Committee and Council endorse:

- a) the overall approach as set out in the Report and, in particular the next steps as included in para 3.1; together with
- b) the operating principle set out above, namely 'to seek to avoid the community losing what it already had and valued, whilst avoiding the rate payer being required to pay for it twice (i.e. to avoid "double taxation")'.

The instructions of the Budget and Policy Committee and Council were sought.

The Meeting closed at 7.00pm

Signed:

Dated:

CHAIRMAN