

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

As most readers will be aware the Government has announced its decision on the reorganisation of local government in Devon.

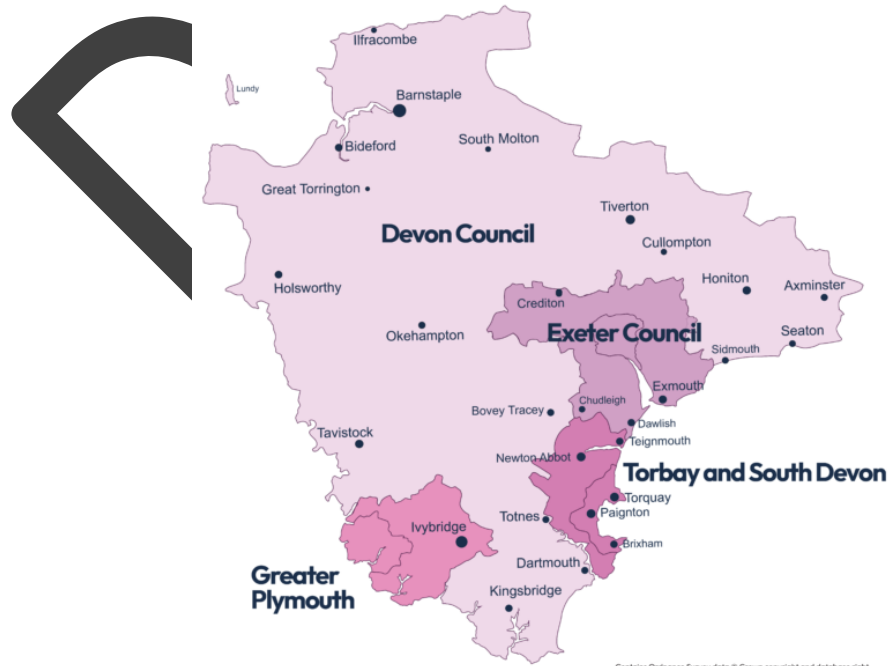
The current organisation of Devon

Devon is currently divided into two self-governing unitary authorities, Plymouth and Torbay, and an upper tier authority Devon County Council based in Exeter which governs the rest of Devon with eight lower tier authorities (including South Hams).

As a result, in our area there is a split of responsibilities between Devon County Council (education, libraries, adult social care, children's social services, public transport and highways, emergency planning, waste disposal and trading standards) and South Hams District Council (housing and homelessness, planning and building control, licensing, electoral registration, council tax billing, environmental health, refuse collection, street cleaning and civic amenities such as public toilets, community centres, museums, parks, cemeteries/crematoria and local markets).

What is proposed for Devon from 2028?

From April 2028 Devon will be comprised of just four unitary authorities. These will be Greater Plymouth Council, Exeter Council, Torbay and South Devon Council and Devon Council. Modbury will be part of Devon Council which stretches from Salcombe in the south to Ilfracombe in the north and Axminster in the East. The following map shows the boundaries of the four new councils.



What is a unitary authority and how does it differ from what we have at the moment?

A unitary authority is one which is responsible for the delivery of all statutory local government services. It will replace the current two-tier system described above.

What will not change?

In most areas of Devon there is a third tier of parish and town councils which are not being reorganised. Typically, they deliver non-statutory services and manage localized amenities such as village halls, play areas and allotments for which they request payment from their “parent” council known as a precept. Modbury Parish Council is one of these.

When and how is this change to take place?

The task of splitting Devon County Council’s services between the four new unitaries and each unitary absorbing the eight district councils’ services is huge. For this reason, the four new authorities will be elected in May 2027 but will concentrate on planning the transition and not take on their new responsibilities until April 2028 when the eleven old councils will cease to exist.

Why should I care?

We all depend on local authority services to collect our rubbish, clean our streets, maintain our roads, educate our youngsters and care for the elderly. We also all have to pay for those services through our council tax, our car park charges or admission to sports and community centres.

Since different council areas require different levels of income to fulfil their statutory duties, this can mean significantly different levels of council tax rates or service standards. Whether the new arrangements mean higher council tax rates or reduced services, we could all be affected.

What could it mean for me and my family?

Modbury residents will be served by the new Devon Council. The case made by those promoting the new structure is that the savings associated with reducing from eleven to four councils will compensate for any change in the distribution of council tax resources between them. Our current County Councillor, Louise Wainwright has warned, however, that because there is an imbalance between the transfer of council tax income and the transfer of financial liabilities, council tax rates may have to rise in this area or services may have to be trimmed/cut.

There are no details about how this new council would work. Even the decision as to where the new Council will be headquartered will be contentious - the leading candidate at present is Barnstaple, well over two hours away and almost 100 miles from the southern tip of the South Hams!

Can anything be done to change the decision?

Devon County Council and South Hams District Council are both making representation to Angela Rayner, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, urging her to reconsider the decision.

What can Modbury Parish Council do to help?

We have responded to the government's earlier consultation and supported the Devon and South Hams three-unitary alternative. We have also contacted Member of Parliament Caroline Voaden, to voice our opposition to the proposals. If there is no significant change, our main role now will be to support the new Devon Council. To this end we will be joining all the other parishes and towns in the Salcombe division in planning for the new regime.

What seems clear is that more responsibility will be delegated down to individual towns and parishes and the already hardworking volunteers who provide the mainstay of services at the lowest tier of local government.

You can find more information on the changes at <https://www.futuredevon.org.uk> and if you want to comment on them, please contact your local MP, Caroline Voaden at caroline.voaden.mp@parliament.uk or via her constituency office on 01803 658461.

Barbara Price, Phil Smith and Ann Turner, Modbury Parish Council