

DALC Position Statement May 2025

Some of what you need to know about towns and parishes in the face of Local Government Reorganisation.

Over the last couple of months DALC has engaged with its members to find out their views and concerns regarding LGR. As part of this, councils were invited to send in pen portraits of their councils and communities. The information gained has contributed to this paper.

1 All towns and parishes:

- care passionately about their communities
- know their communities inside and out
- are proud of their communities and their identities
- prioritise the needs of their communities

2 Local council finance and functions

Altogether, Devon local councils precept for £25,000,000 approx. to enable them to carry out their functions and invest in their communities. This is local delivery that contributes to the resilience, well-being and quality of life for residents across the county.

All towns and parishes:

- **make decisions** on behalf of their communities
- **consult and represent** the views of their residents to other authorities
- **provide localised decision making** accountable to their electorate
- **inform** residents about matters that do or could affect them
- **identify and deliver appropriate services** according to local need
- **keep their public areas** and streets clean and tidy
- **maintain property** that they own
- **work in partnership** with other organisations in their communities
- **lead on national and local celebrations** that develop community relationships and strengthen cohesion e.g. the Jubilee, the Coronation, VE Day, May Fairs, Beating the Bounds, etc.
- **grant fund** community groups and organisations

This is the baseline picture. All parishes carry out these functions. Many do much more, including some or all of these: housing provision, buying, developing and managing community buildings and facilities such as cinemas and museums; land management;

delivering regular community events, providing youth services; preparing Emergency Plans and Neighbourhood Plans

3 Local councils' principal concerns are:

- **The condition of local roads** – the degraded surfaces; the speed of traffic; the unsuitability of local roads for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders
- **Their unheard voice** in planning matters
- **The lack of housing supply** including choice and availability for local people
- **The reduction of services** from other authorities, e.g. public transport, public toilets, verge cutting
- **The difficulties of co-operative working** with other authorities
- **The lack of seriousness** with which the work of towns and parishes is regarded

These concerns are shared across the county by large and small parishes.

4 Local council aspirations for their communities include:

- **Taking on and managing more assets** locally for efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.
- **Engaging** even more closely with their communities
- **Communicating** even more effectively with their residents
- **Delivering neglected services** their communities want such as youth provision
- **Combatting rural isolation**
- **Initiating and collaborating** with measures to support health and well-being, safer communities and sustainability
- **Developing partnerships** to retain and reinforce town centres
- **Addressing the climate and ecological emergency** by changing practices, developing projects and collaborating with community groups

5 Local councils aspire to achieve with other authorities in the local government sector both now and in the future:

- an effective working relationship
- to be taken seriously
- to have their views invited and listened to
- to be seen as capable and valued partners
- to operate on principles of cooperation, dialogue and respect
- the recognition of their community's unique identity

6. Local councils and Local Government Reorganisation

Many councils are willing to take on assets and provide local services to their communities which might otherwise be lost under LGR.

Some smaller parishes currently rely on delivery for some services from their district and the county council. If these arrangements are going to change under a new unitary authority, they need to know.

Some district councils have started to engage with town councils on asset transfer. However, our sector cannot be regarded as a handy drop off point for loss-making assets and services.

The sector needs to know what statutory services any new unitary will provide under any proposal and what that will look like in practice.

The sector needs to know what the vision is for town and parish engagement under any unitary proposal.

The town and parish sector must be included in the discussions on arrangements for future engagement, cooperation and collaboration with any proposed unitary.

LGR is an opportunity to deliver effective localism, with Devon's communities determining the services they need and a locally accountable and accessible body to deliver them. DALC supports the establishment of new parish councils in areas which are currently unparished, and can offer advice on this process.

DALC will not support any specific proposal for LGR unless it is clearly the view of towns and parishes in our membership but it will use the evidence coming from members and continue to work with members to identify the extent to which any proposals meet the aspirations of towns and parishes to play an effective as opposed to side-lined role in local government.

We prefer to see proposals that set out clearly the way in which towns and parishes will not only be included in discussions but also be seen as a crucial conduit for conveying community messages to unitary and public sector delivery structures on services provision and design and to be actively used to convey messages back to the community. This implies a need for appropriate mechanisms to be built into any network or partnership proposals. For example, there could be clear consultation and involvement methods resourced with simple accessible structures, in which the local council sector is seen as the natural partner in innovation, initiation and monitoring of services to communities and be engaged with the unitary as a key partner in achieving them.