

Notes from a Teams Meeting with Exeter City Council Tuesday 28th July on Local Government reorganisation.

This meeting was concerned with the process of reorganisation rather than the consequences of it. Much of the information we already knew but it helps to put it down in one place.

After reorganisation, Newton St Cyres will become part of a Greater Exeter. A lot of other parishes (49) and Crediton will also become part of this unitary authority. Parish and Town Councils will continue to exist. Their role may be greater or it may not, nothing is certain. The new authority will have 86 elected councillors. Ward boundaries are not yet known.

Timeline for the changes

- 1) Autumn 2026, new legislation will be introduced into parliament to permit the reorganisation to come about. This will be followed in the winter of 2026/7 with other necessary legal steps including a structural change order.
- 2) A joint committee will come into action from autumn this year to work out how the changes will come about. This body will have very little power but hopefully will be able to facilitate the smooth transition to the new authorities. The committee will be made of up of existing elected representatives, 5 from DCC, 1 from East Devon, 1 from Mid Devon 1 from Teignbridge and 2 from Exeter City. The committee will:
 - a. Draft a code of conduct
 - b. Suggest the structure of an implantation team
 - c. Set up an implementation plan

It will not:

- a. Recruit for the new senior administrative posts, although temporary appointments will be made to oversee the changes and the chief executive of DCC will head up the team.
- b. Design the operating systems
- c. Draw up policies
- d. Set a budget

The joint committee will be dissolved when the shadow authority comes into existence

- 3) There will be elections for the new authority on 6th May 2027, there will also be Parish Councils elections on that day.
- 4) The elected councillors will form part of a 'shadow authority' and must meet within 14 days of the election. The Shadow Authority will work alongside existing councils until 31st March 2028. Existing services will continue 'as is' until that final handover date. On the 1st April, the new authorities will take over.

Currently we are in the 'discovery phase'. This is basically listing everything the existing councils have from community assets, staff, contracts and buildings to the services provided and then working out how to divide them up. There is a lot to do. New data, digital and payroll systems will have to worked out, decisions will need to be made as to where administrative bases will be and how many staff will be required. The hope is that many of the existing employed staff will be assigned new roles within the new authorities. The senior administrators across the county are keen to push the process forward and have working together informally for some time. However, there was great concern from some councils present at the meeting that staff were leaving due to uncertainty and during the interim, councils will have even worse staffing problems, leading to backlogs in, for example, planning. When put to Exeter City officials, they admitted that there is a possibility that some of this backlog may get 'lost'. There was also concern that projects

with a timeline spanning the change would get lost as well. The advice from Exeter was 'get it done before the change!'

The Exeter staff were keen to emphasise that this reorganisation would lead to stronger voices for local communities, better local services and more power within local communities. They emphasised that town and parish councils were vital.