

Proposed Civic Agreement between the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) and Devon County Council (DCC)

Report of the Director of Public Health and Communities

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1) Recommendation

That the Cabinet be asked to:

(a) approve the proposed Civic Agreement between the Council and Devon Association of Local Councils.

2) Background / Introduction

Devon has multi-tiered elected local government structures, with County, District and Town and Parish (TAPs) Councils in place. Positive, open and informed relationships and timely collaboration are key to our daily activity as well as achieving our joint strategic outcomes. In time of both crisis and celebration, local government bodies and their communities have worked closely together to support and connect with each other and to facilitate and develop community resilience.

Town and parish councils are the first tier of local government and the closest to communities, providing our towns and villages with a democratically accountable voice, with structure to deliver local services and champion what matters to local people. There are 410 parishes in Devon, of which there are 359 parish or town councils representing approximately 550,000 electors.

Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) plays a key role in supporting vibrant local governance in Devon. As a member-based organisation for local councils in Devon (currently 348 of the 359 TAPs are members (97%), DALC supports vibrant local governance in the county by:

- supporting councils to serve their communities effectively,
- promoting good governance and leadership, community engagement, and partnership working.

DALC aims to strengthen the capacity, capability, and impact of local councils, whilst promoting the principles of democracy, transparency, inclusivity, and continuous improvement. Its strategic aims are:

- Supporting member councils
- Fostering knowledge sharing and support among members
- Encouraging meaningful engagement between councils and communities
- Proactively representing and advocating for the interests of the local council sector
- Building strategic partnerships and alliances

The Council has worked alongside town and parish councils throughout its history and continues to do so in order to deliver across joint areas of concern and aspiration, such as but not limited to highway and drainage matters, conservation, and public rights of ways, as well as developing alternative community provision (such as community libraries, lavatories, and transport). During the recent pandemic DALC and TAPs demonstrated their local knowledge and expertise, agility, and innovation in providing vital local support to the most vulnerable in Devon and coordinating/facilitating mutual aid and support work. This demonstrated the key relevance and importance of this first tier of government on the resilience of local people and communities.

This agreement is in line with the Government's emerging Civil Society Covenant, which was subject to consultation in December 2024. This seeks to better align Government departments with the community, voluntary sector, faith, and social enterprise sectors.

3) Main Body / Proposal

Devon County Council and the DALC now wish to reaffirm and galvanise further their historical but often ad-hoc working relationship through a shared Civic Agreement.

The agreement formalises previously ad-hoc collaborative activity, introducing a framework to inform, plan, facilitate, and implement joint 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.

Our joint vision is of vibrant local governance at all tiers, with robust leadership, informed and decisive action, and effective partnerships, proactively facilitating response to key strategic issues within our communities.

The agreement sets out an ongoing commitment to work in partnership to better understand and collectively respond to key challenges and opportunities for Devon in the years ahead.

The agreement recognises the fundamental role that these tiers of local government (alongside other key partners) have in collaboration, co-design, and sharing resources to generate greater benefits and improved outcomes for Devon and its communities.

The agreement will set out how we will develop shared strategic priorities, principles and ways of working. These will include:

- six-monthly communication between DALC representatives and DCC officers/DCC Senior Leadership Team and elected members.
- topic specific joint sessions around priority themes and an annual joint learning/development event, including TAP and DCC elected members.

Critically, the agreement will be underpinned by an annual and mutually agreed plan of activity around specific areas of focus and priority, which will include key priorities for the Council.

Partnership arrangements will be established with designated lead representatives from each organisation finalising and driving activity. This agreement will help both parties to continue to deliver long lasting value, benefits and learning for both organisations and bring opportunities and structure for staff and member engagement, activity, and learning.

4) Options / Alternatives

There is no alternative recommendation for this civic agreement. The civic agreement does not preclude DALC or the Council entering into other agreements or engagement with other partners or sectors.

5) Consultations / Representations / Technical Data

No consultation has been commissioned. However, this document has been co-produced by DCC officers and representatives/members of DALC. DALC membership is made up of 348 town and parish councils (97% of such council in Devon) who wish to work collaboratively.

6) Strategic Plan

This proposal aligns with the vision and priorities in the Council's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 and the Corporate Plan (2024-25) and has the potential to enable delivery of aspects of the Council's principles around good governance, decision making and partnership.

This proposal will support the aim to help the county to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, build on the resilience of local people and communities to create a fairer, healthier, and more caring place, and grasp the opportunity to create a greener, more prosperous and inclusive future for all. And in particular, helping:

- communities be safe, connected, and resilient,

- to work together with citizens, with specific focus on highways and transport for 2024-25,
- to build relationships with partners to facilitate improved and targeted community services

7) Financial Considerations

The Agreement will have no specific financial implication on the organisation. It will need some administrative support and limited activity from wider officer resources. Any indirect costs should be seen alongside the opportunities to improve delivery and efficiency of services; the potential to secure joint bids for funding and wider public investment.

8) Legal Considerations

The agreement is a non-legally binding Memorandum of Understanding.

The civic agreement does not preclude the Council entering into other agreements or engagement with other partners or sectors.

9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)

The agreement will be carbon neutral. In progressing this proposal, an Impact Assessment has been prepared which will be circulated separately to Cabinet Members and available on the Council's website.

10) Equality Considerations

In progressing this proposal, an Impact Assessment has been prepared which has been published on the Council's website and will be provided to Cabinet Members. The report considers the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty that requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other prohibited conduct.
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding in relation to the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage, and civil partnership (for employment), pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation).

The signing of this agreement could in turn lead to significant positive impacts for all citizens through better sharing of information and insight and joint working to tackle specific issues, particularly those impacting people from groups with protected characteristics. Members will need to consider the Impact Assessment for the purposes of this item.

11) Risk Management Considerations

Given its nature, the Agreement does not present an additional risk to the Council. However, the successful delivery of the agreement's aspirations around stronger partnerships and improved working could help to mitigate elements of some of the Council's risks around sustainability, sufficiency and resilience.

12) Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations

The proposal will help to deliver the Council's Strategic and Corporate Plan priorities in developing its work with a key partner in Devon; will provide value for money in developing innovative solutions and learning to increase efficiency, effectiveness of services and to mitigate risks; and develop capacity, capability, and connections between the Council and DALC town and parish councils in Devon.

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Electoral Divisions

All

Councillor Roger Croad

Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

N/A

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