

## A Devolution Deal for Devon – Kingsbridge Town Council comments

Please find the draft minutes below from Kingsbridge Town Council's full council meeting held on 12 March 2024 relating to the above:

### "23/148 A DEVOLUTION DEAL FOR DEVON

Members considered the Devolution Deal for Devon which proposed to establish a new Combined Authority for Devon and Torbay. Information had been viewed from central government, Plymouth City Council, Devon Association of Local Councils and the South Hams Society. It was **RESOLVED** to respond to the public consultation that KTC did not support the proposals and for the public consultation feedback to be delegated to the Chairman and Town Clerk to include the following: another layer of local government would inherently be complex, the proposals were largely aspirational only, Plymouth with circa 25% of the Devon population was not involved, there were concerns over future funding and there was no direct devolution to district, town and parish level."

Further information and rationale below:

1. Another layer of local government would inherently be complex.

Local residents regularly struggle to understand the current system of local government in Devon i.e. county, district/borough/city and town/parish councils. The introduction of a Combined Authority will serve to further complicate an already complex system which will no doubt engender suspicion or apathy.

2. The proposals were largely aspirational only.

There is much hyperbole and little detail available on the key tenets of the Deal i.e. Finance & Investment, Skills & Education, Housing & Land, Transport and Net Zero & Climate Adaption. For example, the Town Council supports the South Hams Society's well considered argument regarding Housing that there is nothing definite on offer, nothing is guaranteed and housing matters should be left with each of the District Councils to progress.

3. Plymouth with circa 25% of the Devon population was not involved.

Plymouth City Council's leader has described the proposals as "unreasonable and unrealistic (...) the final deal on the table would have been a step backwards given that 25 years ago Plymouth became a unitary authority and took back responsibility for key areas such as education and transport". Indeed, "A devolution deal for Devon" is a misnomer; the proposals actually represent a devolution deal for circa 75% of Devon's population.

4. There were concerns over future funding.

Probably the chief concern for the Town Council is future funding arrangements. Government has allocated £1m for capacity building up to and including financial year 2026/27. In the absence of assured ongoing funding a new Combined Authority will not be sustainable and the Town Council has significant fears that post 2026/27 the financial burden will be placed on Devon's taxpayers via current Precepts leading to a degradation of existing services.

5. There was no direct devolution to district, town and parish level.

The 8 district authorities across Devon will be represented on the Combined Authority by 2 non-constituent members who will only have decision making powers on general matters and will have no influence upon budgets, policy, scrutiny and investment decisions. Town and parish councils will have no voice whatsoever. Government's policy paper reads like a 'done deal' and therefore it can only be assumed that the current public consultation is a box ticking exercise. Ultimately, we believe there is no delegation of powers to a town and parish level.