

**PUBLIC QUESTIONS**  
**Scrutiny Committee**  
**14<sup>th</sup> July 2025.**

Councillor Barry Warren – Chairman of Willand Parish Council.

My questions relate to item 9 on your agenda.

It is appreciated that this is all at a very early stage but whatever the final decision is it would appear that Town and Parish Councils will still have a function and need some guidance please. There must be some models or guidance from such proposed unitary authorities which are already in place.

**Q1. What information is available as to the future of Town and Parish Councils after the new authorities are formed?**

The process of local government reorganisation (LGR) refers to the intent, by government, to change the structure of principal councils in two-tier areas to remove county and district/city/borough councils, through the process known as unitarisation. This process does not impact on the existence of current town or parish councils, though clearly their relationship with their principal council in future will be with a different entity to those as present.

**Q2. What is the expected time scale for any changes to be implemented?**

Government expects the new unitary councils in non-priority areas to be created to take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2028, though clearly this will be subject to future statutory processes being achieved to enable such a timeline.

Currently Willand Parish Council lease a number of open spaces/play areas from MDDC. Plans are in place for their maintenance, refurbishment and replacement equipment as existing comes to end of life. Contingency funds are set aside for this.

**Q3. Is there any idea as to what will happen to the Leases?**

- (a) Will they continue for the full term?**
- (b) Should either side cancel the Leases now to stabilise the position?**
- (c) What is likely to happen to Land wholly owned by the Parish Council?**
- (d) Will District Council 'gift' or sell land to Town or Parish Councils for a nominal sum?**

All existing contracts entered into by current councils will be automatically transferred to the new council, through a process known as contract novation. Local authorities often have long-term contracts for the provision of services (sometimes running to decades), and it is not the case that existing leases should be cancelled to provide stability – stability of continuance is the default position during any change, although clearly once the new councils are in existence, any contract negotiation at that point would be with the new council. Land wholly owned by the parish council

will continue to be wholly owned by the parish council. Any decisions on assets made before the change order is implemented, will continue to be a decision of the pre-existing asset holder, and policy decisions will be taken by councils in the normal way.

Currently Willand Parish Council cut all the roadside verges within the Parish and they receive a financial grant which covers a good proportion of the cost from Devon County Council.

**Q4. Will such arrangements continue?**

There is no reason why this would not continue assuming multi-year agreements are in place. However, as outlined in a previous response, any negotiations with 'the highway authority' after the commencement date (expected on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2028) will be with the successor council as the county council will no longer exist.

**Q5. Is there any advice or indications which can be conveyed to Town and Parish Councils to assist with their planning for the practicalities of the future?**

It is suggested that town and parish councils continue to liaise with their representatives in the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) and make the most of opportunities to engage in the process through the current survey and particularly through the statutory period of consultation, likely due springtime of 2026, where all viable proposals will be formally consulted upon. One inevitable outcome from this LGR process is that towns and parishes will be dealing with much larger councils than that of today. How the new councils support their towns and parishes to deliver at neighbourhood level and to thrive with, and for, their communities, will be a challenge that has to be met in order that residents see positive outcomes of this desired shift to larger, single-tier units of local government.