

EDDC Report for the 2026 AGM

The past year brought Councillors to tears as they tried to navigate their way through the maze of Local Government Reorganisation. An operation which was ostensibly supposed to streamline and simplify the processes and procedures affecting the life of Residents, only had one aim in mind: cutting costs. Costs to the Central Government that is. Would that mean that Council Tax and Precepts would rise to fill the gaps? Somehow the plans were silent on that point.

Well how was this to be achieved? The guidelines posted from Westminster left a lot of room for local discretion. In translation: you submit a large number of competing plans, so Westminster can impose its own solution. And this brought about a flurry of creative administrative activity in the various Local Authorities in Devon. In the end two scenarios for reorganisation were sent to London at the end of November. One envisaging a single unitary authority covering the whole of Devon and the other a 1:4:5 amalgamation plan of District Councils. Naturally, the City Councils in Plymouth and Exeter exploited this opportunity with plans to form their own kingdoms. Nothing more than the annexation of the more desirable parts of neighbouring Districts, leaving the less fortunate parts of Devon to join and fend for themselves. Well, in another 4 to 6 weeks Westminster will reveal its hand.

The problem with the Reorganisation is that it creates all manner of unintended consequences at the services level of local authority operations. The harmonisation of IT Systems, finances, housing and planning demands a large effort from the Council Officers and diverts money and personnel from their regular duties. The point being that the Reorganisation plans envisage elections to the unitary authority in May 2027, followed by the formation of a shadow authority which will be fully functional and ready to take over from the current administrations in May 2028. Quite a challenge if you ask me.

EDDC has essentially been treading water in the past year trying to carry on as normal, while preparing for an uncertain future. The joker in the pack is of course the Local Plan 2020-2041 to be submitted to Whitehall at the end of this year. And that's where the fun begins. Central Government is out on a crusade to build 1.5 million new homes by the end of this parliament in 2029. And in order to achieve this, has increased the housing allocations to the various Local Authorities by eye-watering numbers, larger than our Residents are happy to tolerate. Luckily for EDDC, the Local Plan can be submitted under a transitional arrangement if it does so this year. And that means that we only need to find land for about 21000 new homes in the Plan period to 2041. And the reward for taking a more leisurely path to a submission under the new arrangements, is a requirement of an additional 5000 homes. The Strategic Planning Committee went into overdrive last autumn, sifting through the various options and possibilities. And always looking for the technical solution of plumping for The Least Worst Option. My chair in the Council Chamber did not get a chance to get cold between meetings. And the inevitable happened: residents became unhappy with plans and tried to derail the process and stop building in their particular areas. The Council received 1.1 million words in comments during the public consultation on the Plan, and to the consternation of many Residents, these were processed by AI tools in view of the tight time frame. By the by, more words than appear in Tolstoy's magnum opus, War and Peace.

But, it currently looks like that EDDC will be submitting the plan under the transitional arrangements, and I for one am relieved that I will be spared a repeat of last autumn.

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