

DALC AGM

Donna Mansen (DCC) and Stephen Watford (MDDC) briefed us on the situation on LGR. This is what they had to say:

- In July, four unitary councils were proposed by the government for Devon.
- Staff within the Devon Councils started working together to sort out the new councils. It was estimated over 4000 separate decisions needed to be made and implemented in about 18 months. The time was very short and the costs high. Donna felt that many processes would have to wait several years before everything was sorted.
- Devon County Council sent a legal pre-action letter to the government challenging the decision. The grounds for the challenge were:
 - The authorities favoured 3 large urban areas over the larger rural and coastal area. This was seen as 'gerrymandering'.
 - The costs were prohibitive.
 - When FOI requests were put in for information supporting the decision, these were denied due to 'lack of time and resources'.
- On September 7th, the government halted the process and told the councils that no further costs should be incurred. Although DCC had not progressed far in asking for a judicial review, other councils further down the line had had similar arguments examined and considered to be valid.
- Sometime in October, we shall have a considered response from the government to the challenges brought by many councils. Meanwhile, it is business as usual for Devon. Services will continue to be organised as they currently are and the elections next May will be for the existing councils.
- Perhaps more importantly, it seems likely we will have an elected 'Mayor of Devon' and it is possible that will come about in May next year or in 2028. We already have a structure called the 'Combined County Authority' which could be the basis of their office.
- When asked what they felt the eventual outcome would be the officers, they had no firm evidence for any particular solution, however they said there is a renewed emphasis on place and community which they hoped would lead to a different outcome. They also emphasised that some of the preparatory work they had undertaken could be used to improve existing services so the work was not entirely wasted.