

Devolution could turn West of England into 'wild west'

Government devolution plans could turn the West of England into the "wild west", a councillor has warned.

George Dexter (Lib Dem, Okehampton North) was speaking at a special meeting of West Devon Borough Council this week, where members were united in opposing any moves towards a single unitary authority for Devon. They want more time to come up with options and to "widely consult" with the community

With all eight of Devon's district councils set to meet this week ahead of Friday's deadline to respond to plans, there are fears local democracy could be lost as power is shifted from Whitehall to the regions. Despite support for devolution, West Devon councillors have criticised the process as being "railroaded through".

Cllr Dexter described the reorganisations as complex and "hideously expensive", adding: "The way in which it is presented is outrageous. It's looking at making the South West into the wild west where power bids are made for various parts of Devon."

He warned that such a scenario would result in "vast expense and a loss of services", reports [Devon Live](#).

Devon's district councils stand united in opposing a single unitary authority for Devon and in a joint statement last week said they don't support postponing this spring's county council elections, a move the government has hinted at for councils that have agreed plans for reforms.

Cllr Neil Jory (Con, Milton Ford) said a single Devon unitary authority, without Plymouth and Exeter, the former already a unitary and the latter proposing to be one, would leave Devon

picking up the pieces without an economic centre and no way of raising substantial income.

Cllr Jane Elliott (Green, Chagford) said it was important not to be too negative and to take “a step back” as there is a lot in the white paper that councillors would probably agree with.

“The main thrust is about devolution and about more money being invested locally, but the overall message is being undermined by the idea about the journey to get there,” she said. “We need more time to work out what is best of the people of Devon.”

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