

Report to:	The Leader of the Council	
Date:	29 October 2025	
Title:	Devonport National Defence Growth Area Memorandum of Understanding	
Portfolio Area:	Economy, Investment and Assets	
Divisions Affected:	All	
Local Member(s) briefed:	NA	
Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Sustainable Growth and Place		
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Approval and clearance obtained:		Y
Date next steps can be taken		On expiry of call-in period
For Cabinet and delegated executive decisions only		
Key decision? (≥£500k in value or significant effect on communities in two or more electoral divisions)		N
Published in advance on Cabinet Work Programme?		Y
Urgency Procedure(s) used if 'N' to Work Programme?		Y

Exempt: Appendices 1 and 2 are not for publication by virtue of category 3 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

Reason for exemption: Appendices 1 and 2 contain information which is commercially sensitive for the Council and third parties. Disclosure at this time would be likely to harm the Council's and third parties' commercial interests. Therefore, the public interest in maintaining the exemptions outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Recommendation

1. that the Leader of the Council approves the principle of Cornwall Council entering into the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and associated Information Sharing Agreement with Plymouth City Council, Devon County Council, and Torbay Council drafts of which are contained within Exempt Appendices 1 and 2 to this Report and the Leader delegates authority to the Strategic Director for Sustainable Growth to negotiate and conclude the said Memorandum of Understanding and Information Sharing Protocol.

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for Cornwall Council to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and associated Information Sharing Agreement with Plymouth City Council, Devon County Council, and Torbay Council. This partnership will enable coordinated strategic planning and delivery in support of the Defence Growth Deal, with a focus on maximising benefits for Cornwall residents.
- 1.2 This is a specific and clear example of Cornwall Council working in partnership with our near neighbours to ensure that we work collaboratively and on behalf of all our residents.
- 1.3 The Memorandum of Understanding and associated Information Sharing Agreement are currently being negotiated and finalised with partners and we will ensure that the agreement is published when finalised.

2 Purpose of Report and key information**2.1 Background**

- 2.2 The Defence Growth Deal represents a transformative opportunity for Cornwall to align with a £4.4 billion regional investment in HMNB Devonport and associated defence infrastructure over the next decade. This investment will catalyse job creation across defence, construction, engineering, marine autonomy, and associated supply chains/sectors that are critical to Cornwall's economic future.
- 2.3 Devonport's expansion will require a workforce of over 7,500 people, including 5,500 roles at Babcock alone, with a mix of entry-level and experienced positions. This demand presents a unique opportunity for Cornwall to position its residents to access these jobs through targeted housing, transport, and skills interventions.
- 2.4 Cornwall's participation in this initiative is strategically aligned with several key frameworks:

- **Cornwall's Good Growth Plan** outlines a vision for inclusive, sustainable growth, with a focus on enabling infrastructure, sector-led innovation, and workforce development. The Defence Growth Deal supports these ambitions by unlocking high-value employment and investment in adjacent sectors such as marine, space, and advanced manufacturing.
 - **The Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Workforce and Skills Strategy** identifies defence, marine, and engineering as priority sectors for growth. It highlights the need to upskill the local workforce, address economic inactivity, and improve access to technical and higher-level qualifications. The strategy also emphasises the importance of aligning housing and transport with employment opportunities — key enablers for Cornwall's participation in the Devonport growth programme.
 - **Housing Strategy/ Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy/ Local Plan** all seek to maximise opportunities for a range of housing that is affordable to our communities. The Council is currently in the informal stages of preparing our next Local Plan. This includes engagement with communities and stakeholders and preparing evidence to understand our tenure and type, scale, location and phasing of housing, improving transport connectivity to Devonport, and supporting the development of employment sites such as St Mawgan, Cudrose, and Goonhilly. There are also existing development opportunities that can be accelerated such as Treledan, Saltash.
- 2.5 Overall, within all functions there are a range of short, medium and long term actions that can be progressed to ensure that the opportunities created are to the benefit of our local communities who will secure access to more jobs, housing and transport connections.
- 2.6 By entering into the Memorandum of Understanding and Information Sharing Agreement, Cornwall Council will be able to shape regional planning, influence investment decisions, and ensure that its communities are not left behind. This partnership will also enable Cornwall to contribute to the development of a Defence Technical College, with a hub-and-spoke model that ensures access to learners across the peninsula.
- 2.7 **Summary of the MoU and Governance Arrangements**
- 2.8 The MoU sets out a framework for collaboration across the four Councils, with quarterly reporting to the Regional Leaders Group (RLG) comprising the Leaders of each of the participating local authorities. Key thematic priorities include:
- Skills and Workforce Development: Joint planning, data sharing, employer engagement, and support for vulnerable groups.

- Transport and Connectivity: Strategic planning to improve commuting access and support housing growth.
 - Co-ordinate Local Plans and Housing Policy
 - Innovation and Business Productivity: Coordinated investment, site development, and inward investment marketing.
- 2.9 Governance will be supported by Strategic Directors from each of the participating Councils and aligned with emerging structures such as the Team Plymouth Executive Board, which includes MOD, Babcock, and Plymouth civic leaders.
- 2.10 Further to the agreement to enter into the MOU we will work with partners and our respective legal representatives to finalise the MOU so that it can be signed before the end of November 2025.
- 2.11 **Proposed Deliverables**
- 2.12 Cornwall Council's participation in the Defence Growth Deal will be underpinned by a clear set of deliverables to be agreed that enable strategic alignment, operational readiness, and inclusive growth. These deliverables will ensure Cornwall is well-positioned to influence regional planning and maximise local benefit.
- 2.13 **Formal Agreement of the MoU and Data Sharing Agreement**
- 2.14 Cornwall Council will formally enter into the Memorandum of Understanding and associated Information Sharing Agreement with Plymouth City Council, Devon County Council, and Torbay Council. This will establish the framework for collaboration across thematic areas including skills, housing, transport, and innovation, and enable the secure exchange of data to inform joint planning and delivery.
- 2.15 **Identification of a Lead Officer and Supporting Team**
- 2.16 A dedicated lead officer will be appointed to represent Cornwall in regional governance structures and coordinate internal delivery. This officer will be supported by a cross-functional team drawn from planning, housing, transport, skills, and economic development services. Their role will include:
- Liaising with regional partners and the Team Plymouth Executive Board.
 - Overseeing Cornwall's work programme and ensuring alignment with local strategies.
 - Facilitating stakeholder engagement and reporting to the Council's Directors Team (CDT) and elected members.

2.17 Development of a Cornwall Specific Work Programme

2.18 Cornwall Council will develop a tailored programme of work to ensure its strategic priorities are embedded in the wider Defence Growth Deal. Funding for this will be addressed through the current Comprehensive Spending Review and Budget setting process. This will include:

2.19 Housing Growth Strategy for SE Cornwall

2.20 Identification of housing sites linked to workforce demand across a range of types and tenures. This will be aligned with the emerging Local Plan and supported by infrastructure planning to ensure sustainable development.

2.21 Skills Alignment with Defence Sector Needs

2.22 Mapping of current and future skills requirements across defence, construction, marine, and engineering sectors. Cornwall Council will work with Further/Higher Education (FE/HE) institutions, training providers, and sector networks to co-design provision, expand access to Higher Technical Qualifications, and support inclusive pathways into employment.

2.23 Integration with Freeport, Enterprise Zones (EZs), and Connect to Work Programmes

2.24 Coordination of activity across Cornwall's EZs and Freeport sites to support defence supply chains and innovation which programmes such as Connect to Work and WorkWell will be leveraged to support residents facing barriers to employment, ensuring inclusive access to new opportunities.

2.25 Strategic Input into Defence Technical College Proposals

2.26 Cornwall Council will contribute to the development of a regional Defence Technical College, advocating for a hub-and-spoke model that ensures accessibility for learners across Cornwall. This will include identifying potential sites, aligning curriculum with local sector needs, and engaging with employers to shape provision.

3 Benefits for Customers/Residents

3.1 Cornwall Council's engagement in the Defence Growth Deal will be guided by a set of strategic objectives designed to ensure that Cornwall's residents, businesses, and communities benefit fully from the opportunities arising from regional defence investment. These objectives are rooted in Cornwall's Good Growth Plan, housing strategies, local transport plan and Workforce and Skills Strategy and reflect the Council's role as a strategic convener and delivery partner.

3.2 Maximising Local Access to New Jobs

3.3 The Devonport expansion will generate over 7,500 jobs across defence, construction, and engineering sectors. Cornwall will work to ensure that its residents, particularly those in South-East Cornwall, are equipped to access these roles. This includes:

- Targeted outreach and engagement through programmes like **Connect to Work** and **WorkWell**.
- Employer-led training and apprenticeships in priority sectors.
- Inclusive recruitment pathways for underrepresented groups, including care leavers, veterans, and those with health conditions.

3.4 **Aligning Housing Growth with Workforce Demand**

3.5 The Defence Growth Deal provides opportunities for our communities to access jobs and attract people to the area. Cornwall Council will:

- Work together to ensure relevant Local Plans reflect aligned messages.
- Commission joint evidence in order to set out the tenure and type, scale, location and phasing of housing, jobs and transport required to meet the demands of regional defence sector growth.
- Develop a joint pipeline of housing construction and infrastructure development
- Seek to accelerate existing housing delivery and identify development opportunities.

3.6 **Coordinating Transport Infrastructure**

3.7 Improved connectivity is essential to enable Cornwall residents to access jobs at Devonport and other strategic sites. Cornwall Council will:

- Support the development of a **Tavistock–Plymouth rail link** ensuring it benefits Cornwall's residents and their access to rail.
- Identify future enhancements to the **Torpoint Ferry and Tamar Bridge** through development of the Tamar 2050 strategy.
- Commission a public transport strategy and lobby government for funding to increase the proportion of residents able to commute to Devonport within one hour from within Cornwall and Devon.
- Work with Network Rail, GWR and neighbouring authorities to identify rail enhancement opportunities to improve connectivity between Liskeard, Plymouth and Ivybridge, including improved access to rail stations between Bodmin Parkway and Plymouth.

- Align transport planning with housing and employment growth corridors in the proposed new Cornwall Local Plan 2050.
- Develop a walking and cycling infrastructure plan (LCWIP) for Torpoint and its immediate hinterland.

3.8 **Strengthening Skills Provision**

3.9 Cornwall Council will collaborate with FE/HE institutions, training providers, and sector networks to:

- Co-design agile, modular training aligned with employer needs.
- Expand access to **Higher Technical Qualifications** in engineering, digital, and marine sectors.
- Support the development of a **Defence Technical College**, ensuring Cornwall learners can access specialist provision through a hub-and-spoke model.

3.10 **Supporting Innovation and Business Productivity**

3.11 Cornwall's distinctive sectors—marine, data and space, and advanced manufacturing—are closely aligned with defence priorities. Cornwall Council will:

- Support coordinating activity across **Enterprise Zones, Freeport sites**, and innovation hubs such as **Goonhilly, St Mawgan, and Culdrose**.
- Promote inward investment and site development to support defence supply chains.
- Support business productivity and growth opportunities in our SME based supply-chains

3.12 **Contributing to Regional Governance and Delivery**

3.13 Cornwall Council will play an active role in shaping regional governance structures, including:

- Participation in the **Team Plymouth Executive Board** and associated workstreams.
- Identification of a **lead officer** and supporting team to coordinate Cornwall's strategic and delivery work.
- Alignment of Cornwall's objectives with the wider regional programme, ensuring visibility and influence in decision-making.

4 Relevant Previous Decisions

None

5 Consultation and Engagement

5.1 Overview of Consultation

5.2 Consultation and engagement have been integral to the development of Cornwall Council's proposed participation in the Devonport National Defence Growth Area Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and associated Information Sharing Agreement.

5.3 **Cabinet Member Engagement:** The Leader, the Economy Portfolio Holder and the Housing Portfolio have been briefed on the strategic importance of the MoU and the opportunities it presents for Cornwall and are supportive of the proposed approach recommended in this report.

5.4 **Council Directors Team (CDT):** The proposal was presented to CDT on **18 September 2025**, where it was endorsed for progression. CDT recognised the alignment of the initiative with Cornwall's strategic priorities, including the **Good Growth Plan, Workforce and Skills Strategy**, and the emerging **Local Plan**.

5.5 **Local Member Engagement:** This has not yet been discussed at a local member or community level. An immediate priority has been agreed to visit the SE Cornwall Community Area Partnership, Saltash and other interested Town/Parish Councils. This will help us establish a communication network for appropriate engagement at a local community level.

6 Financial Implications of the proposed course of action/decision

6.1 There are some resourcing requirements to support the proposal, the identification of a lead officer and supporting team has been reviewed to ensure alignment with existing budgets and staffing capacity. No additional funding is required at this stage, and the proposal is considered deliverable within current resource allocations. The draft MoU sets out some of the potential commitments and delivery objectives.

6.2 Investment asks relating to the MoU will be considered in accordance with the Council's Financial regulatory Framework.

6.3 **Future Funding Opportunities:** future funding streams linked to the Defence Growth Deal, including opportunities for joint bids, infrastructure investment,

and skills programme funding. Proactive engagement will support financial planning and ensure readiness to respond to regional investment opportunities.

- 6.4 Data Sharing and Governance Costs: The legal and information governance implications of the Data Sharing Agreement have been reviewed, colleagues confirming that existing frameworks and protocols can accommodate the proposed arrangements without incurring additional costs.
- 6.5 As set out above, any investment asks will be considered in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulatory Framework and if there are any additional legal implications beyond the initial signing of the MoU and information sharing agreement appropriate advice will be sought. Any further decisions required will follow the Council's governance and assurance processes and be taken in accordance with the Council's scheme of delegation, including contracts and procurement or grant funding.

7 Legal/Governance Implications of the proposed course of action/decision

- 7.1 The latest draft MoU is included at Appendix 1 and the latest draft Information Sharing Agreement is included at Appendix 2. Both documents are subject to further negotiation between the parties before being finalised but the key terms are summarised below.
- 7.2 The MoU is a commitment to a strong partnership working across administrative boundaries, but as currently drafted does not commit the Council to joint administration or governance.
- 7.3 The MoU does not have an expiry date and therefore once entered into the Council will only be able to terminate it if all the parties agree to its termination. It is anticipated to be a long-term arrangement, given the reference to the 10-year strategy being commissioned for increasing the proportion of the population able to access employment opportunities at Devonport. However, the MoU is not legally enforceable but is a vehicle for describing the understanding between the parties. Equally the Council would not be able to enforce the agreement should another partner breach its obligations resulting in loss to the Council but there could be reputational implications arising as a result of any breach.
- 7.4 The Information Sharing Agreement is to be entered into simultaneously to the MoU. This requires that information sharing accords with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 and any other applicable legislation and is otherwise lawful. The agreement sets out the information sharing purpose and data protection principles and will need to set out named Council officers who will have access to the information to

be shared pursuant to the MoU and information sharing agreement. The Council needs to ensure it complies with data protection legislation and the Information Sharing Agreement in the sharing of information between the partners and there is an undertaking to apply the security measures.

8 Risk Implications of the proposed course of action/decision

- 8.1 **Delivery Capacity:** There is a risk that Cornwall Council may face challenges in mobilising sufficient internal capacity to deliver the commitments outlined in the MoU, particularly across planning, housing, transport, and skills. This will be mitigated through the appointment of a lead officer and cross-functional support team.
- 8.2 **Data Governance and Compliance:** The Information Sharing Agreement must comply with all relevant legislation, including GDPR. Any failure to ensure robust data governance could result in reputational or legal risk. This is being addressed through early engagement with Legal Services and Information Governance.
- 8.3 **Alignment Across Partners:** As the MoU involves multiple local authorities, there is a risk of misalignment in priorities or delivery timelines. This will be managed through quarterly reporting to the Regional Leaders Group and participation in the Team Plymouth Executive Board.
- 8.4 **Risk of Not Taking the Decision:**
- 8.5 **Loss of Strategic Influence:** Without formal participation, Cornwall Council risks being excluded from regional planning and investment decisions related to the Defence Growth Deal. This could result in missed opportunities for infrastructure funding, skills development, and inward investment.
- 8.6 **Reduced Access to Employment Opportunities:** The Devonport expansion will generate over 7,500 jobs. Failure to engage could limit Cornwall residents' access to these roles, particularly in South-East Cornwall, and exacerbate existing inequalities in employment and skills.
- 8.7 **Disconnection from Regional Growth Initiatives:** Not entering into the MoU would isolate Cornwall from collaborative efforts to align housing, transport, and innovation strategies with defence sector growth. This could hinder the Council's ability to deliver on its Good Growth Plan and Workforce and Skills Strategy.
- 8.8 In summary, the risks of not proceeding are significant and would undermine Cornwall Council's ability to secure long-term benefits for its communities.

The proposed decision enables proactive risk management and positions Cornwall as a key regional partner.

9 Cornwall Development and Decision Wheel

- 9.1 Cornwall Council's participation in the Devonport National Defence Growth Area MoU presents significant opportunities to advance social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and equality across the region.
- 9.2 **Social Impact:** The initiative will support inclusive access to employment, particularly for underrepresented groups such as care leavers, veterans, and individuals with health conditions. Programmes like *Connect to Work* and *WorkWell* will be leveraged to reduce economic inactivity and promote social mobility.
- 9.3 **Environmental Considerations:** The alignment of housing and transport planning with regional growth will enable sustainable development. Opportunities to improve public transport, active travel infrastructure, and reduce commuting emissions are central to the proposed workstreams.
- 9.4 **Equality and Diversity:** The programme will embed inclusive recruitment and training pathways, ensuring that all residents—regardless of background—can benefit from the growth in defence, engineering, and marine sectors. Engagement with FE/HE providers and employers will ensure that equality principles are reflected in curriculum design and delivery.
- 9.5 To ensure these impacts are fully assessed and embedded in delivery: Full Cornwall Development and Decision Wheels will be prepared for each area of programme delivery, including housing, transport, skills, and innovation. These will guide decision-making, monitor outcomes, and ensure alignment with the Council's commitments to fairness, sustainability, and community wellbeing.

10 Options available

- 10.1 **Option 1: Enter into the Memorandum of Understanding and Information Sharing Agreement (Recommended)**
- 10.2 This option enables Cornwall Council to formally participate in the regional partnership with Plymouth City Council, Devon County Council, and Torbay Council. It allows the Council to:
 - Influence strategic planning and investment decisions.

- Align housing, transport, and skills interventions with regional defence sector growth.
- Secure access to shared data to inform evidence-based decision-making.
- Ensure Cornwall's communities benefit from the 7,500+ jobs and associated infrastructure investment.

10.3 This option is aligned with the Council's Good Growth Plan, Workforce and Skills Strategy, and emerging Local Plan.

10.4 **Option 2: Engage Informally Without Signing the MoU**

10.5 Cornwall Council could choose to engage with the regional programme on an informal basis, without entering into a formal agreement. While this may reduce administrative burden, it would:

- Limit Cornwall's influence over regional governance and decision-making.
- Restrict access to shared data and coordinated planning opportunities.
- Risk Cornwall being perceived as a passive partner, potentially missing out on funding and delivery opportunities.

10.6 This option is not recommended due to the strategic importance of formal collaboration.

10.7 **Option 3: Decline Participation**

10.8 Cornwall Council could opt not to participate in the MoU or associated Data Sharing Agreement. This would:

- Severely limit Cornwall's ability to shape regional defence sector growth.
- Risk exclusion from investment, infrastructure, and employment opportunities.
- Undermine the Council's strategic objectives around inclusive growth, housing delivery, and workforce development.
- This option carries significant risk and is not recommended.

10.9 Identify the preferred option and say why it is preferred i.e. supported by analysis, evidence etc.

11 **Supporting Information (Appendices)**

11.1 Appendix 1 - Draft Memorandum of Understanding (Exempt)

11.2 Appendix 2 – Information Sharing Agreement (Exempt)

12 Background Papers

None

13 Approval and clearance**All reports:**

Final report sign offs	This report has been cleared by (or mark not required if appropriate)	Date
Governance/Legal (Required for all reports)	Mark Pearce	27/10/25
Finance (Required for all reports)	Jo Smith	27/10/25
Cornwall Development and Decision Wheel (where required)		
Service Director (Required for all reports)	Phil Mason	27/10/25
Strategic Director (If required)		