

Devolution/Budget – As reported to you at the last meeting the Government have confirmed the Devolution Deal will be implemented without any changes (for the time being) from the Deal that was agreed with the previous Government. Currently a lot of behind the scenes legal work is being carried out to prepare the statutory instrument which will be laid down before Parliament. Timescales are fluid but it will likely be later this autumn.

Following the Chancellor's Budget, the indications we have from Central Government is that the increases DCC will have to pay for National Insurance Contributions as an employer will be funded so it should not be a budget pressure for the next financial year. However, the impact on Adult Social Care and other care providers is still being assessed.

Within the Budget documents as well as there has been an indication from the Government that they might want to re-open the thorny issue of Local Government Reorganisation and have a single Unitary Authority instead of the current 'Two Tier' system of District and County Councils. I hope in Devon we do not go down this avenue as it is very unlikely there would be agreement over what size and shape a unitary authority would be and instead of capitalising on our Devolution Deal and working together, I suspect the local councils in Devon will get consumed by this ongoing debate instead. The set up we have had in Devon with 'Team Devon' has, I think, worked relatively well. Of course, if the Government orders reorganisation then we will have to do it, but I don't think we are at that point yet so for the time being, 'business as usual' should remain the right approach.

Highways Winter Service – As we head into the colder weather period, I thought I might also be worth talking about the Council's 'Winter' or gritting service. DCC has replaced and upgraded six of its 37 frontline gritters with newer models ahead of this winter. These replacement vehicles include touchscreen controls to enable drivers to adjust their plough attachments without leaving their cab. The gritters are deployed by the Council's Network Operations Control Centre. Based in Exeter, they use CCTV, weather information, traffic and congestion data to monitor Devon's road network 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Around 24,000 tonnes of salt are stored in gritting depots across the county at the start of the season. There are also more than 3,500 grit bins located across Devon to support community self-help on roads which are not on the gritting network. At this time of year, local communities are encouraged to check grit bins in their area and you can report any empty grit bins can be reported via the DCC "Report It" webpages (type in devon.cc/report-it on your internet browser).

Household Support Fund – DCC will receive a share of the Household Support Fund, as we have each year since 2021. This allocation, like previous ones, is a little over £5 million. The council are now agreeing how we will distribute the funding, working closely with Devon's eight District, City and Borough councils and voluntary and community partners. Citizens Advice Devon will be one of the recipients to receive Household Support Funding so that they can continue to support people who are struggling to meet their energy needs. Support comes in the shape of fuel voucher payments, and longer-term relief of fuel poverty through initiatives that help homes become more energy-efficient, and that help people stay warm at home – such as heated throws, body warmer or rechargeable hot water bottle, for example. This latest round of Household Support Fund also allows DCC to continue to provide Free School Meal holiday vouchers to families whose children are eligible for benefit-related free school meals during term time.

People Strategy – I don't normally comment on my Cabinet remit with staffing as a lot of it is focused on behind the scenes work which isn't always of relevance to my Town and Parish Councils, however I thought I would highlight the fact that the Council has agreed and is implementing a new 'People's Strategy' which, put simply, is about making sure our Council workforce feels valued and also instils a greater performance culture within the organisation. We have already started to see some tangible improvements with a new recruitment and retention strategy for Children's Services which has been reducing the number of Agency workers employed by DCC, and across the organisation the overall absence rate has declined (down to 8.9 days per year from 9.6 days lost to absence, sickness, etc.). Compared with the private sector that rate is still high, but it is lower with comparable public sector organisations and the trend is going in the right direction.

Ultimately I am of the view that a happier and more efficient workforce ultimately means a better service from Council Officers and officials to the people of Devon.

Local Highways Matters – Elastomac has been used to repair the pothole defects on the road from North Town to Petrockstowe Station.

America Lane – This is now due to go to the Public Rights of Way Committee in March.

A386 Meeth Closure – Unfortunately the A386 at Meeth is due to be closed for drainage and gully repair work from 25th November – Friday 13th December, but it is planned to reopen the road on evenings from 9th – 13th December. Petrockstowe will **not** be advertised as a diversion but obviously local drivers will, unfortunately, probably choose to do so. Highways have said that they are looking to erect signage to deter any HGV traffic from trying to use Petrockstowe as a cut through route.

Locality Budget - I have been delighted to support many community projects with my local Councillor Locality Budget Grant from helping to set up Community Libraries, repairing community assets and supporting local schools with new learning resources. I do still have some funds available as we approach the end of this current financial year so if you do have a project on in your area please do get in touch as your organisation may be eligible for a grant.

District Councillor Report – Cllr Chris Wheatly

Community and Resources (C&R)

We received a Report from the Street Name & Numbering Officer(SNN)regarding-requirement by TDC to approve and resolve the dispute over X3 Street names for the Torrington Housing Development in School Lane being undertaken by Clayewater Homes Ltd/ Aster Group. The names agreed after discussion and approval were Meadow View, Babbage was approved and Cawthorne Drive to be removed and the third street name to be referred to Great Torrington Town Council for final decision of the suffix. This was discussed and voted for unanimously by Council.

TDC considered a revised proposal of tree planting in Bideford - Garfield Community Woodland and grassland after a presentation from Mike Day Lead Ranger and as part of the TDC support for the North Devon Biosphere. The public feedback was positive and to be funded by Devon County Council and the Woodland Trust. Maintenance was discussed and the proposal was approved and resolved.

Head of Legal Governance and Monitoring presented Household Support Fund 6.

This is government Funding for £267,568 for financial hardship covering 1st Oct 2024 until 31st March 2025and voted for unanimously. The fund covers areas such as Food, Energy, Appliances, Housing, and essentials. Apply torridge.gov.uk/householdfund or 01271 371 499.

Full Council

We received various Reports highlights including Peer and challenge Levelling Up from our Chief Executive and Leader Steve Hearse and Ken James regarding the £20,000,000 Levelling Up Fund from government with development and a mission-based approach to implementation after meeting with Alex Norris MP Undersecretary for Housing, Communities and Local government. Alex Norris MP has been cordially invited to Torridge to show case the various Projects including the Innovation Center which shall provide Green Energy, maritime research, and support for Offshore wind technology.

LUP Annual Report on Treasury Management from the Financial Manager and Draft Financial Outturn 2023/24 confirming the recommendations for the surplus.

A discussion commenced about the £500K surplus assigned to Leisure services and decarbonisation to aid the reduction of TDC footprint. The setting aside of draft surplus from 2023/24 as outlined in this report was approved.

Holsworthy Leisure Centre decarbonisation and energy efficiency projects and capital programme to be increased to £1.834M for a new roof and decarbonisation works at Holsworthy Leisure Centre including to install new water to air pumps to replace the existing oil boiler and new solar panels for the new roof. Bideford Town Hall and Old Library renovation decarbonisation projects and energy/carbon efficiency including roofs, were discussed, and approved by Council.

Council received a presentation from Judith Gentry non -executive Director from Active Torridge validating our Active Torridge Business Plan and acknowledging the improvements that need to be made after the Leader Ken James had provided details on the Business Plan. We also had a slide presentation from Chris Keeble Chief Operating Officer of Active Torridge highlighting strategic aims, Reviews, Financial history, growth, postcode analysis. Fees and management projections. The business plan was approved after discussions by Council.

The Community Projects Officer presented a report on funding of three play zone schemes by reallocating Rural England Prosperity Funding working in partnership with Active Torridge and community organisations including with football foundations and was welcomed and approved by Council. The three PlayZones are located at Stanhope Park, Holsworthy; Polyfield East-the-Water Bideford and the former Tennis Courts at Gas Lane Torrington at a cost of £275,000 (approx) per PlayZone with funds made available from Rural England Prosperity Fund and Active Torridge as the suitable partner to manage each site for multi-use game areas and determine suitable surfaces for each site. Funding was approved by Council.

External Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Cheryl Cottle Hunkin Chair of External Overview and Scrutiny presented an enlightening annual Report to Council stating that the Committee now have many external organisations that have been welcomed to our Committee and working in partnership with Torridge District Council and the Pickwell Foundation and North Devon Plus. The Chair thanked everyone for accepting our invites and the time to come and present to us. Issues raised in our meetings have been picked up in the local press and thank you in particular the hard work of Karen Hewlett in Democratic Services. Many issues have been raised under urgent matters, and it has been good to hear from members of the public and contributions speaking at Committee meetings. The Committee intends to work with North Devon District Council. Working together will bring a stronger voice to those issues which affect the wider region such as Agriculture, Dentistry and Childcare provision.

Councillor Climate Working Group Meeting

Funding for cycle friendly accreditation scheme was approved costing £2030 and approved unanimously by members of the Committee.

Other item highlighted was Plant based food policy after Brian from Plant based Council Movement informed us about the impact of farming on land use, animal agriculture of which 85% of Uk farming is animal farming. 37% Meat and Dairy with Biodiversity loss main component of climate change. We received a Slide Plant Based Presentation. The Committee agreed and recognised the importance and potential in this area of Plant based food and crops as part of a balanced approach for us.