

**Cllr A Saywell** - Dear Councillors, I am sorry I cannot be with you this evening. I hope Cllr Busby is recovering well from his recent illness. Although it has been quiet on the formal meeting front over the summer period it has been a busy time at Devon County Council with a lot of work going on behind the scenes on budget/financial management, modernising the County Council, the Governance Review and ongoing devolution negotiations. Main highlights are:

- **Devolution** – Negotiations with Central Government remain ongoing, if all goes well a Devolution Deal may be agreed and ready to go public later this month or into October... but as ever with negotiations like this they are subject to change so it will be a case of wait and see!
- **Budgets** – The County Council is currently projecting an overspend of £9 million for the end of the financial year, with the main pressures coming from the Adult Social Care budget. However, I remind you this time last year we were looking at a £40 million overspend and ended up bringing that back down to a break even position. I am confident through management action plans that these overspends can be reduced and covered off. We are not anywhere near the position other Councils like Birmingham have found themselves in... BUT, that does not mean we can be complacent and rest on our laurels. And it is a reminder that our room for financial manoeuvre remains tight.
- **A386 Mile Hill Road Closure** – There will be a major closure on the A386 at Mile Hill will be closed for drainage works 9th October – 27th October. The official diversion is via the A3124. Highways are trying to mitigate people using local cut through roads to Taddiport through using ‘No access to Taddiport’ on the A386 to deter people from trying to get through at Little Torrington. HGVs will also be directed to turn around at the Gribble layby. The closure will start at Apple Cross so access to Taddiport from the A386 will, in any event, be difficult so the easiest way to get in and out of Torrington during this closure will be to get onto the A3124 instead...
- **Highways Meeting** – The site meeting with the Neighbourhood Highways Officer and County Road Safety Manager took place and they were agreeable to adjusting the speed limit on Brandise Hill. However, the issue, as ever, remains funding! I am currently in ongoing discussions with DCC’s Traffic Team to see if we can find an agreeable solution.
- **Great Torrington School extension** – A new ‘block’ has been constructed on the grounds of the secondary school at Great Torrington, jointly funded by the school and DCC. The project consists of a new two-story teaching block which will accommodate three new classrooms, office space, small group work areas and a new library resource area which will be connected to the main school via a new link. The project has also enabled the existing library to be re-modelled into additional dining space for pupils, providing a much-needed expansion to the original small dining hall originally built in 1939. The total cost was £1.5 million, of which DCC funded £725,000. DCC’s funds have come from local housing development contributions... so if you ever wonder where education contributions go, here is a very good example!
- **DCC Pledges to make Care Leavers a protected characteristic** – At Full Council DCC agreed to give care leavers – young people who have been in the care of the local authority – protected characteristic status. It’s recognition that young people’s

experience of being in the care system can be a potential source of discrimination similar to other protected characteristics such as race or disability. It means that we will make sure that the experiences of young people in care and care leavers will be considered in all of its decisions. But it is also a foundation on which to develop better support across Devon as whole, not just in the services that we are responsible for. We will therefore work with partners to improve support for care experienced people in all aspects of their lives including housing and accommodation, health, employment, as well as education.

- **Mobile Library/Community Libraries** – DCC’s Cabinet took the decision to end the Mobile Library service and replace it with different rural outreach offers as the current vans have reached the end of their working lives (15+ years) and need replacing. However there are only 3,100 active users of the mobile van and there has been a clear trend, both Devon wide and on the Torrington van, of a continued overall decline in the number of users. The current service costs over £200,000 in revenue funding a year and the cost to purchase four new bespoke vans will be up to £800,000.
- To recommission the van service as it is now will require a significant investment of funding for a service with declining numbers and would put the viability of the main library service at risk. So, rather than do that, DCC is looking at alternatives including using the Home Library Service to deliver books to people’s home, increased uptake of digital offers on kindles, etc. and a community/rural library outreach offer that would be supported by the main Library service and would not be onerous on volunteers to maintain. Last week I visited with the Library Officer from DCC potential community library sites/projects at Langtree, Beaford and High Bickington. I was hoping to visit Petrockstowe but due to Malcolm’s illness we had to postpone.
- The opposition have ‘called in’ the decision to end the mobile van service and it is due to be discussed by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee at the end of this month so we shall see what happens...

**DCIir Cottle-Hunkin** – The work to restore Great Torrington pannier market’s Market house is well underway, funded by central government’s rural prosperity fund. It will have a huge positive impact on the town centre and is greatly welcomed.

There are also plans for lots of new exciting play equipment in Bideford’s Victoria Park, total cost £280,000, partially funded by the same central government grant and also £100k from Bideford Bridge Trust and £10k from Bideford Town Council.

Torrington Full council- voted in support of the campaign to save the mobile library service in Devon, recognising the rurality of Torrington District and its importance for people living in those rural areas, particularly for the very youngest to encourage a love of reading, and the elderly and disabled who rely on it, not only for books but as a point of contact and offering them some independence. There are also ways to develop the service as they have in other counties to benefit the rural communities eg hearing aid batteries, selling stamps, council enquiry service, citizens advice etc. The campaign is also receiving legal representation on the issue. The county council has a statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive library

service and lawyers and barristers agree that the decision-making and logic behind closing the mobile libraries is flawed and challengeable.

Torridge Full Council also voted to move forward with encouraging and facilitating community-led housing in the form of Community Land Trusts. Recognising that to help tackle the housing crisis we need to look at more than just council-owned land, many of which are car parks and simply not suitable. There is currently a vacant post at TDC of “enabling officer” but when it is filled we will need to work together with private landowners, parish councils and local communities to drive it forward.

External Overview & Scrutiny Committee-

-last week’s meeting had a focus on mental health provision in torridge and supporting the Link Centre in Bideford specifically, which DCC are planning to close. We heard from service users, SOHS and the local police. There are some similar arguments to the mobile libraries to be honest! DCC are saying that voluntary organisations can pick up the pieces and we don’t believe that’s right. There are people who use the Link Centres with very complex needs and who need consistent and trained professional support. The meeting requests our MP to visit, along with Cllr McInness (lead cabinet member from DCC), asking them to support the service as well as reopen the referral routes and the activities that they held for service users pre-covid.

- the next meeting is a joint meeting with North Devon Council: Community Safety Partnership led by superintendent Toby Davies

-the following meeting has a focus on education and apprenticeships in Torridge with representatives from Harland and Wolff, CMTG and Petroc College.

A plaque is planned to go up at Petrockstowe Station, fully funded by a private individual, commemorating the first and last passenger at the station Edith Fishleigh, and Station Master Fred Cooper. The plan is to have a small unveiling ceremony for people who would like to attend and we will be kept updated about this.