

HOLCOMBE ROGUS PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the September Meeting
Held in the King George V Memorial Hall on Thursday 28th September 2023
At 7pm

APPROVED

- 9.1** **Present:** **ACTION
TO BE
TAKEN**
 Councillors: Adam Pilgrim (Chairman), Jane Lock, Sally Barker, Nikki Orchard, Rupert Snook, and Frances Freeman
 District Councillors Gill Westcott & Jane Lock – Report attached
 County Councillor Ray Radford – Report attached
 Leslie Findlay Parish Clerk/RFO
 Mr G Czapiewski (P3 Co-ordinator)
 3 Residents
- Apologies:** No apologies received
- The Chairman opened the Meeting by welcoming everyone attending and thanking the Councillors for their continued commitment to the Council
- OPEN FORUM**
- Mr Czapiewski raised the concern that the ditch running down South Street had been filled up with stones from the extremely heavy rain in the past few months. It was suggested that as the County Council do not clear out the leats and ditches (as previously done in the past) it should be a task that could be undertaken by the Community. **GC**
 Councillors agreed that the best course of action would be to ask for volunteers on the Community website. Mr Czapiewski agreed to raise this matter with Mr Barker.
 It was agreed that the 3 residents could raise their concerns at the planning stage.
- 9.2** **Declaration of Interests:** None declared
- 9.3** **Minutes of Previous Meetings and Matters arising**
 The July Minutes were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record and unanimously approved by all Councillors.
 There were no matters arising.
- 9.4** **Environment**
- 9.4.1** PROW: Nothing to report
- 9.4.2** Canal Report: Report attached
- 9.4.3** Westleigh Quarry: Cllr Snook will be attending the Quarry Liaison Meeting on Monday 9th October. **RS**
- 9.5** **Highways**
- 9.5.1** Work carried out: It is hoped that the road closure from Holcombe Rogus to Sampford Peverell will include the repair of the potholes along that stretch of road.
- 9.5.2** Repairs to be reported: Cllr Snook continues to post any new potholes on the DCC website. Residents have raised the large potholes along Whitebrook Terrace. (*Clerk has actioned reference W231666120*)
- 9.6** **Planning**
- 9.6.1** Applications discussed:
- 9.6.1.1** **22/02235/HOUSE** Replacement roof to include the integration of solar tiles, replacement of 3 rooflights and installation of additional rooflight at Squirrel Cottage.

Councillors heard from both the applicant and objector to this application. One resident raised concerns that a Councillor may have a personal interest in this matter. This was disputed by the Chairman but the Councillor chose to abstain from this item. Five votes in favour and one abstention supporting this decision.

- 9.6.1.2** **23/01415/CAT** Notification of intention to raise the crown of 1 Cherry Tree by 2m within the Conservation area at Pear Close – *No comment*

MDDC Decisions:

- 9.6.2** **23/00567/FULL** Erection of agricultural workers dwelling following removal of derelict caravan at plot A Greenham Reach – *granted full planning permission with conditions*
23/00909/FULL Retention of security gate and fence at Webbers Church of England Primary School – *granted full planning permission*
23/00910/LBC – was withdrawn. (Listed building consent for the security gates at Webbers School)
23/01168/CAT Notification of intention to reduce row of beech trees (G1) up to the silo to height of guttering approx. 3 metres and dismantle 1 Ash tree and 1 Sycamore tree to ground level within a Conservation Area at Ridgeway Farm – *No objections*
23/00994/LBC Listed Building consent for the removal of existing roof covering from rear roof and to replace with natural Spanish slate at 7 South Street – *LBC consent granted with conditions.*

- 9.6.3** Councillors approved and the Chairman signed the Planning Minutes dated 17th August.
9.6.4 Councillors approved and the Vice Chair signed the Planning Minutes dated 7th September. These are available to view on the website.

- 9.6.5** MDDC Planning Committee Meeting – The Pondground Quarry Firing Range application was withdrawn. No explanation was given by MDDC.

9.7 **Mary Fewings Playpark**

The Monthly inspection was carried out with no comments.
The “No fires or BBQ’s” sign has been ordered.

9.8 **Training**

Councillors Freeman and Barker attended the DALC Webinar on Responding to Planning Applications - 11 Sept.
Cllr snook hopes to attend a Landscape Character Workshop on Thursday 12th October at 10:00 AM at the Council’s offices.
Councillors hope to attend the webinar on 19th October relating to Class Q permitted development conversions.

ALL

9.9 **Clerk/Finance**

- 9.9.1** The following income had been received:
July interest £40.90
August interest £42.20

9.9.2 **Expenditure paid:**

- 9.9.2.1** DALC new Cllr Courses - £36 (approved April 23 4.9.3.2)
9.9.2.2 DALC Planning training £72.00 (approved May 23 5.12.3.3)
9.9.2.3 MG Groundcare £48 – second strim (approved Jan 23 1.6.5)
Sutcliffe Play £30.46 – moulded caps for play equipment. (Paid with authority from Chairman and Clerk)

9.9.3	It was resolved that the following expenditure was approved for payment by the RFO:			
	Amount £	BACS/cheque	Payable to	Comments
9.9.3.1	147.50	BACS	MDDC	Uncontested Election Fees
9.9.3.2	172.80	BACS	MDDC	Additional charge for emptying litter bins as MDDC had sent an incorrect invoice.
9.9.3.3	604.80	BACS	MDDC	Emptying of litter bins (due in Jan 24)
9.9.3.4	1945.50	BACS	LJ Findlay	Wages Apr – Sept 23
9.9.3.5	100.00	BACS	Citizens Advice	Donation
9.9.3.6	50.00	BACS	Clerk for RBL	Remembrance Wreath – cheque paid by Clerk to RBL and reimbursed
9.9.3.7	55.00	BACS	Ken White Signs	Fire sign for Playpark

9.9.4 The bank statements and bank reconciliation for July and August were checked and signed by the Chairman.

9.10 Matters brought forward for information or future agenda.

9.10.1 There are three Councillor vacancies.

LF

9.10.2 The Clerk will publish the 2024 dates for Council meetings.

9.10.3 Police Sergeant Simon Andrews hopes to attend the October meeting.

9.10.4 Cllr Barker had been asked by a resident if a separate bin could be placed at Whitebrook as the current general one was very smelly. MDDC are not using separate bins for dog poo so the general bin is for all rubbish.

9.10.5 District Councillor Westcott informed the PC that MDDC were trying to become more inclusive and diverse and if anyone had any suggestions as to how this could be achieved to contact her.

ALL

9.10.6 The verges need ploughing from Home Farm to Holly Tree Cottage and down Black Lane. Clerk to advise the County Councillor.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.15pm. The next Full Council Meeting will be on Thursday 26th October at 7pm in the Village Hall.

Adam Pilgrim
Chairman
Holcombe Rogus Parish Council

REPORTS FOR HOLCOMBE ROGUS PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
28th SEPTEMBER 2023

Canal Report

The Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee is meeting on 3rd October at 7.00pm.

I am your representative on that Committee. Its Chairman alternates between a County and District Councillor and is elected each October. The 2023/4 Chairman has to be a District Councillor.

The influx of new District Councillors has changed the mix of Councillors and has resulted in more GWCJAC members who are unfamiliar with the subtle evolution of the Committee and the management of the Canal. I suggest that we support the nomination of Councillor Les Cruwys as Chairman while the new members settle into their role. He has been a member for many years and has a great knowledge of the Canal and its management.

The meeting will consider seeking explanations from the most senior District Council Officers about the implications of its poor Enforcement of Planning Conditions with reference to the problems at Red Linhay, beside the Canal in Halberton.

The Canal Manager's progress report to the meeting on Tuesday will include details of the terrible flooding around Lowdwells earlier in the year, the investigations into its cause and the extensive works being planned to mitigate its recurrence. The Canal was not at fault. A watercourse beside the Canal that probably supplied an historic mill at Lowdwells Cottage and its extensive downstream culvert was overwhelmed by the extreme rainfall.

In addition to this extensive remedial work the Canal's Ranger Service continues to maintain the Canal to a very high standard, in my view, better looked after than those controlled by the Canal and River Trust nationwide.

Adam Pilgrim
Councillor

Mid Devon District Council Report for Holcombe Rogus Parish Council

Support for Care Leavers

I am extremely proud that Mid Devon was the first local authority in Devon to exempt care leavers under 25 years old from Council Tax. This is to support care leavers who already face challenges when they leave care as they learn to budget their finances independently, and move into their own accommodation. The change will be applied retrospectively from the start of the current Council in April 2023.

3 Rivers Developments

Back in 2017 the Council decided to set up a wholly-owned property development company called 3 Rivers Developments. This aimed to deliver high quality homes in Mid Devon, while providing a financial return to the Council. The original decision to start the company was made against a back drop of significant funding cuts from Central Government, and at a time when councils were being encouraged to come up with new funding streams to support service delivery – a model referred to as 'trading and charging'. I think we can all agree that did not go to plan, not just here in Mid Devon but across the country where similar trading ventures are failing with dire implications for local Councils who are already struggling after years of austerity.

While 3 Rivers has delivered successful housing projects since it began, notably the Orchard in Halberton, Threwstones in Tiverton, and a development of social housing in Burlescombe,

its largest project at St Georges Court in Tiverton has encountered a litany of issues which resulted in a loss on that development.

At the start of this year an external report looking at all feasible future options for the company was commissioned, which reported back to Cabinet in early August, and to Full Council on 6th September. It identified four options:

- i. Do nothing, which would rely on the Council approving future projects as no active business plan was currently agreed.
- ii. Place the company in Administration, which would trigger a fire sale of its assets and remove oversight from the Council.
- iii. Soft closure, allowing for the two in-progress builds at Bampton and Tiverton to be completed, for suppliers and tradesmen to be fully paid, and for assets to be sold for the best market return.
- iv. Company Voluntary Liquidation, which would require the in-progress builds to be sold as-is and the profit on its Bampton development would belong to the buyer.

These options were considered alongside internal and external professional advice, and after extensive questions from the public and wider members, option iii, the soft closure, was recommended by Cabinet as it provided the best financial return and lowest overall risk to Mid Devon residents by a notable margin. This was approved unanimously by the Full Council with the acknowledgement that further external professional advice would need to be commissioned to deliver it, and that there would be regular reporting back to Cabinet to allow members –and the public– to openly monitor the progress.

Independently, the Council's Scrutiny committee has also committed to a lessons-learned exercise to identify where, why and how the Council got to this place, and to ensure that we never again allow it to happen. I understand this is on the work plan from November and encourage all to attend the public meetings.

Medium Term Financial Plan

Mid Devon is currently looking at its Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 (next year) through to 2028/29, and the plan for the General Fund –which manages all non-housing services– was presented to Cabinet on 19th September. This should be considered as a 'direction of travel' and sets out the strategy for managing the district's finances while delivering its priorities to residents (both statutory and discretionary). It also sets out the financial risks facing the Council during that period. (The Housing Revenue Account MTFP will be considered separately as it is independent and faces its own unique outlook and risks.)

Whilst there is a certain amount of assumption needed to predict the future, it is not guesswork. There are professional accounting processes to evaluate these prudently to mitigate risks, and MTFPs are an important aid for the upcoming budget setting.

A decade of austerity has seen Central Government cut the district's funding by £5m annually, with an increased reliance on one-off grants which are difficult to budget for when looking at a 4-year plan. Covid-19 saw significant reductions in income, which are only just recovering in areas such as leisure and car parking. Energy costs and the cost-of-living crisis have required funds to be reallocated to support our communities. (Nationally, these costs mean that austerity measures are likely to continue.) Lastly, and crucially, inflation has increased the prices we pay for goods and services, and will be reflected in the pay award to staff which is a significant cost for Mid Devon.

The forecast shortfall for 2024/25 can be attributed to the removal of the one-off targets included within the 2023/24 budget, the reduction in funding across Business Rates and government grants, plus the inflationary uplift driven by the cost-of-living crisis. The sum of these pressures has added £2.1m to Mid Devon's cost base for next year. In the simplest of terms: over £1m of that is due to inflation, with the remainder attributable to the budgeting decisions at the end of the previous Council.

Questions have been asked about why transactions falling within the current year and not on the agreed 2023/24 budget are not shown on the MTFP. Examples given included 3 Rivers Developments, and a previously discussed (and now approved) VAT refund for Mid Devon Leisure. This is a good question. The answer is simply that the plan is looking at the 2024/25 financial year onwards, and those transactions have already been –or are expected to be– completed within the current financial year. Those will instead appear in the outturn financial reports that will be brought through the appropriate committees and to Council for scrutiny as part of its normal business. It is important to recall that the MTFP is an intended direction of travel and not a set of financial accounts. It is forward-looking and not a snapshot in time.

This can seem illogical to those of us used to managing our own or family finances where we always track a single bottom-line figure, but it is a quite normal way to manage budgets in large organisations.

Despite the challenges, Mid Devon continues to deliver a wide range of well performing services, and will continue to invest in services where they deliver value for our communities. We will keep investing in options to reduce energy consumption, for example switching from gas to renewable energies and significant improvements at our leisure centres. Cabinet have agreed to source 100% of our from-grid electrical energy from renewable sources from 1st October. Further options include lowering the heating temperature of our buildings and swimming pools, isolating areas of buildings where heating can be switched off entirely, and increasing our solar energy capture.

Cabinet have agreed the principles and approach to balancing the next budget, the areas it believes are important to protect to deliver the most important services such as retaining our skilled staff base, and to seek recommendations from the Policy Development Groups (PDGs) on appropriate fees for chargeable services, areas where savings could be sought and to what level, but also inviting further ideas. Those PDGs will meet through October, and if you wish to provide representation your attendance would be welcomed. Remember you can speak to the committee members at any time as we are your elected councillors too.

Changes to waste collection services

On recommendation from the Environment PDG, Councillors have agreed to two changes affecting waste collection services in Mid Devon: The first is to postpone the trial of weekly recycling collections to allow for an evaluation of the effectiveness of the current scheme, and the second is to cease collecting side waste from 1st October. Whilst the latter was always intended to happen under the scheme when it was first agreed, any change around waste collections is likely to generate worry for our residents so the discussion around it was understandably quite robust and challenging in the three public meetings where it was discussed.

The minutes of Environment PDG on 15th August, Cabinet on 29th August, and Full Council on 6th September include greater detail, but in summary of the key discussion points:

- i. Our recycling rate has increased to just under 60%, which is very encouraging. The collection of further types of recyclables will now be considered, which has been a long-term aim of the new administration. This will divert waste from landfill and

reduce the occurrence of side waste.

- ii. Other top-performing local authorities have a zero-tolerance approach and do not collect side waste. It is important to note that we are a top-performing local authority in this context.
- iii. Concern was raised over what 'cease collecting' meant in practise, for example would refuse be left in the street for weeks at a time. It was explained that initially households would be contacted with a view to education and providing the correct containers, but if further breaches continued then Section 46 would be applied. This would be a formal warning that would last for 1 year and would only then be escalated further if this warning was breached.
- iv. It was explained that the Council would not let the district become untidy and that they were asking for residents to comply with the existing scheme. The Council would ensure that residents had the appropriate number of containers and bins to meet their needs, and would continue its education programme and ad hoc collections should the build-up of waste become a local problem.
- v. Progress will be monitored and reported back to the Environment PDG, and I implore all interested to attend those meetings.

To be clear: it is in no one's interest to have waste building up that cannot be disposed of. Mid Devon will work with residents, and where necessary landlords, to ensure problems are identified and resolved correctly.

Energy saving grants

Mid Devon are working with Energy Saving Devon Partnership, formerly Cosy Devon, to provide eligible residents with access to two schemes to save money and energy: Homes Upgrade Grant (installs energy efficiency upgrades to homes not connected to the gas grid), and an expansion of ECO4 to reach more households (supporting low-income and vulnerable households with home improvements to reduce energy bills.) These, along with signposting to many other offers of support, can be found at <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents-financial-support/>.

That web page is updated regularly and is my first stop when I need to refer a resident to available help.

Housing Revenue Account / Mid Devon Housing provision of new social housing

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA), which manages the Council's social and affordable housing under the name Mid Devon Housing (MDH), has provided options for potential large sites within its 5-year development programme. The sites considered were Post Hill, Tiverton, St Georges Court, Tiverton and Knowle Lane, Cullompton. Cabinet considered these proposals on 29th August, and agreed the option that would deliver 499 new social and affordable homes by 2027/28, with a surplus of around £1.5m to MDH. This represents a significant escalation of our strategic investment in social housing in the district, increasing from previous targets of around 160 to instead deliver just one short of 500 new homes.

Concentrating on the two Tiverton sites:

- i. Post Hill: It was reported that the final cost could be as much as £22.5m, excluding the land purchase cost. The site would not be eligible for 40% Right to Buy funding, or the 45% Homes England Affordable Homes Programme, and as a greenfield site is ineligible for Brownfield Release Funding.

The average build price would be £351k per unit (compared to £185k for a modular build, and £205k for a traditional build on a more suitable site). To put this into

context, the build cost would be greater than the market valuation. Therefore, considered with other information, it was agreed that MDH should not progress with its development and tender for 70 units on this site.

A specific business case will be required setting out the alternative options for the site most likely to secure alternative housing delivery. Potential alternative options could be to sell to a housing association who can access strategic Homes England funding to improve the value for money, shared ownership, the Rentplus model (rent to buy), or the retention of the site and exploring options such as affordable custom and self-build dwellings.

ii. St Georges Court: This site comprises 15no. 1-bed and 13no. 2-bed apartments, 9no. 2-bed terrace houses, and 1 each 2-bed and 3-bed semi-detached houses. (39 units/64 beds.) This site would be eligible for 40% Right to Buy funding, and by utilising that funding early later projects could make greater use of more favourable grants (I will touch on why that is in a moment). The site represents good value for money with an estimated post-adaption cost of £8.75m leading to a £224k unit price.

After application of £3.46m Right To Buy receipts which reduces the final cost to £5.29m, the average end unit cost would be £136k, which is better value for money than even the cheapest option for Post Hill. The intent is to create an over-60s community (with suitable flexibility) in modern high-specification homes in the heart of the Tiverton town centre community.

This was agreed, subject to an independent and agreed market valuation, creating a mix of 28 social rent and 11 affordable rent homes to meet a specific, identified, local demand.

There a lot of misinformation being shared about what precisely it means for MDH to purchase St Georges Court, with talk of it being one hand bailing out another, shovelling good money after bad, and confusing that specific site with 3 Rivers Developments as an entity. I don't believe this to be deliberate – it is understandable because it is not a simple topic to explain in isolation. Therefore, I will try to concisely set out why I supported this decision:

MDH is a registered provider of social housing and therefore is required to comply with the strict regulatory framework set down by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH). Under those regulations there are specific economic and consumer standards that MDH must comply with that cover governance, viability, value for money, and ensuring that rents are set in accordance with Government policy. There is no subjectivity in those rules.

District Valuer Services (part of the Government's Valuation Office Agency) will value the properties which sets both the fair purchase price and the social rents. That is the standard process for all public housing providers. When purchasing homes for social housing stock there is no special treatment given, nor indeed is it even possible to give, that considers the cost of the original builds or their financing, or the closeness of the seller. The grants and other funding sources Mid Devon rely on to reduce local taxpayer exposure to costs also have their own non-negotiable rules around viability and value-for-money.

Some of the funding available to MDH is time-limited. In the past Mid Devon has been (in my opinion rightly) criticised for not making use of time-limited funds that were available for social housing. At a time of such high demand for local housing to repeat that mistake would be inexcusable. Currently there are £4.1m in 40% Right To Buy receipts available, of which £3.46m is projected to be available here (subject to the agreed valuation). By maximising this use this early, Homes England is supportive of accelerating their 45% Affordable Homes Programme funding which provides more flexibility and a reduction in future funding needs

(which is primarily from borrowing).

That helps to increase the viability of the next social housing options on the plan, and represents circa £8m less future borrowing compared to the previous plan. That is a significant reduction in future risk and loan interest, notwithstanding that the previous plan also carried a funding deficit of £2m minimum versus the now £1.49m projected HRA MTFP surplus.

The options that were agreed provide the best overall value for money, and the most balanced, lowest overall risk position to MDH in isolation of the many valid concerns around 3 Rivers Developments. They are two separate things, and conflating them only serves to make harder the already difficult task of accelerating Mid Devon's social housing provision towards our ambitious target of 500 new homes over the next 5 years – representing nearly 2 new homes each week, every week.

When talking about these topics, please be mindful that long after the politics are forgotten these will still be people's homes, and the language we use to describe them is public record. Unfortunately, I am aware of complaints about statements made by members of this Town Council in the public domain. St Georges Court in particular carries a very high public interest locally for obvious reasons, and emotions are involved, but we owe it to our future neighbours to be calm, objective, and factual when talking about their homes.

Mid Devon Housing Autumn Neighbourhood Walkabouts

The MDH team, along with local councillors, the police, and local service teams will be doing their Autumn Neighbourhood Walkabouts shortly. In Tiverton: Westexe will be walked on 18th and 20th October, and 1st and 6th November; Lowman on 25th October, Cranmore on 27th October, and Castle on 6th November.

These bi-annual walkabouts are an important part of MDHs community engagement process. Drop-in appointments can be accommodated. Please help to let MDH tenants in your wards know about them. The full itinerary can be found on letstalk.middevon.gov.uk, and there is a flyer that can be provided.

Leisure services user feedback

There is also a live survey on letstalk.middevon.gov.uk to gather feedback on leisure and fitness users within the district. If you are a leisure centre user, or know residents who are, please do complete the survey. The Community PDG will be looking at how our leisure services are provided in the coming months and it is important to ensure all users' views are heard.

Thought for the day

Cllr Frank Letch MBE, Chair of the District Council, opens each Full Council meeting with a thought for the day. I believe his thought from the meeting on 6th September is worth repeating and reflecting on:

“90-95% of what we do in local government
has nothing to do with politics,
– and that's its strength. ”

Further Information

If there are other services or projects that Mid Devon provides that members would be interested to find out more about, let me know. As proven with the uptake of the Town Centre support schemes, we work better when we understand the services we each provide

and all contribute to the discussion. This may be particularly useful with some of the assets the Town Council may wish to take over, and shared areas where we can both add value for our communities.

Cllr Jane Lock
Canonsleigh Ward
Cabinet member for Working Environment
Mid Devon District Council
jlock@middevon.gov.uk

Referenced meetings and other resources

1. Reports and Minutes for the Cabinet 1st August (re. care leavers exemption)
<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MIId=1738>
2. Reports and Minutes for the Environment PDG 15th August (re. waste changes)
<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MIId=1762>
NB: Public questions from Cllr Beard relating to the waste changes.
3. Reports and Minutes for the Cabinet 16th August (re. 3RDL options)
<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MIId=1836>
4. Reports and Minutes for the Scrutiny Committee 24th August (re. 3RDL lessons learnt announcement for their future work plan)
<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=131&MIId=1837>
5. Reports and Minutes for the Cabinet 29th August (re. HRA large site options, waste changes, and also the Q1 budget monitoring and corporate performance reports)
<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MIId=1739>
6. Reports and Minutes for the Full Council 6th September (re. care leavers, waste changes, 3RDL soft closure, and others)
<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=156&MIId=1813>
NB: Public questions from Cllrs Griggs, Beard, Bridger, and Bush, mostly relating to the HRA large site options, and the 3RDL soft closure with the following exceptions: Cllr Beard also raised concerns about inadequate consultation in the areas around St Andrew's Street North, and the Scrutiny future work plan. Cllr Bridger also spoke about apologies, and a motion to ban live animals as competition prizes. Cllr Bush also spoke about compliance with housing policy.
(Written answers were not available at the time of this report.)
7. MDH Autumn Neighbourhood Walkabouts 2023
<https://letstalk.middevon.gov.uk/autumn-neighbourhood-walkabouts-2023>
Flyer: <https://letstalk.middevon.gov.uk/27305/widgets/77397/documents/46755>
8. Mid Devon Leisure Fitness Survey
<https://letstalk.middevon.gov.uk/hub-page/leisure>
9. Vibrant Town Centres
<https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/grants-and-funding/love-your-town-centre-capital-investment-fund/>

County Councillor report

The month of August is always very quiet, not much happening at all, this is a little bit of what is going on at County.

This is a time of significant change and opportunity for English local government. Despite the government increasing funding for councils over recent years, a combination of high inflation and rising demand has left local authorities facing some of their toughest budgetary decisions to date.

Our Director of Finance Angie Sinclair revealed that the authority finished the 2022/23 financial year £156,000 in the black on a revenue budget of almost £630 million.

But she warned that – in common with councils across the country – Devon continued to face tough financial challenges

The year since last June has seen all of us gain a better understanding our financial position, stabilising some area of the business which frankly were out of control, when they could/should have been in our control. Surges in service demand, not least in Adult and Children's services make the task more difficult to predict and model financially, but the 'new' corporate Leadership team are clearly all 'rowing' in the same direction, despite events like the cost of living and Ukraine war impacting us, but with no influence over those events.

Last summer Angie Sinclair, Financial Director, warned councillors that Devon faced a £30.5 million overspend with a potential further £10 million on top because of soaring inflation. She called for urgent action to be taken across the authority to curb costs.

Council leaders set up a group of senior officers from every department to go through the budget line by line and identify savings.

An overspend in 2022/23 has been avoided through an organisational-wide response that resulted in a rigorous in-year savings programme.

We currently provide financial support to organisations helping people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless even though we do not have a statutory responsibility to do so.

The proposal to cut the discretionary spending was originally made to help us balance our books in response to soaring demand for our statutory services.

Our contracts with providers will now be extended until the end of March 2024.

In the meantime, we will continue to talk to Devon's eight District and City Councils, working together to agree a way forward that ensures ongoing homelessness support across the county.

Councillor Hart made the announcement having listened to members of the public speak passionately of the impact that the proposed cuts could have on them and others at a special scrutiny committee meeting.

Donna Manson, who is meeting regularly with District Councils' housing services to discuss a way forward.

Our Trading Standards service is reminding businesses, such as takeaways, sandwich bars, care homes and retailers who supply certain single-use plastic items, that a ban comes into force this October, and that they should start thinking now about alternatives and where to source them from.

The ban includes all single-use plastic cutlery, trays, plates, bowls, and balloon sticks, as well as banning the use of certain types of polystyrene cups and food containers used to supply food that is ready to consume.

Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Devolution Deal

The Government has agreed to conclude a devolution deal covering Devon, Plymouth and Torbay this year. The deal will, subject to consultation, see the establishment of a Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Combined County Authority. It will not require a directly-elected Mayor nor costly reorganisation of existing councils. Devon's District Councils will have representation on the CCA as will representatives from the business and education sectors. The CCA will have new powers and additional funding from Government to tackle priorities such housing, public transport, jobs, training and skills. Functions and resources of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership will be folded into the CCA

Regards,

Ray

Ray Radford

Devon County Councillor

Willand & Uffculme Division

Email: ray.radford@devon.gov.uk