

*County Council*  
Thursday, 17th February,  
2022



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DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL

To: Members of Devon County Council

County Hall  
Exeter  
EX2 4QD

9 February 2022

## **AGENDA**

**10. Cabinet Member Reports** (Pages 1 - 18)

To consider reports from Cabinet Members.



## **Report of the Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate and Asset Management**

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 17 February 2022:

By Councillor Hannaford on:

- 1. the Levelling Up White Paper, and the progress of the Devon Devolution Deal, including the aims, objectives and ambitions for Devon.*
- 2. a summarised version of the Race Equality Audit report with action points*

By Councillor Atkinson on:

- 3. the recent invitation of The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for applications for the Landscape Recovery Scheme. It's part of the new 'public money for public goods' system, which replaces the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. Up to 15 projects will be taken forward, each one up to 5 thousand hectares or 50 square kilometres. The projects will concentrate on restoring threatened species and ecosystems, recovering streams and rivers and adapting landscapes for climate mitigation. The competitive process favours large farms. Are we supporting local small farms and our own tenants to work together collaboratively to put in a bid? Especially as in order to put in a bid they have to first form a Community Interest Company. What is the position here in Devon on any bids being made or successful.*

## **Response**

### **1. Levelling Up White Paper and Devon Devolution Deal**

The Levelling Up White Paper was published on 2 February 2022. It sets out an analysis of the causes and impacts of regional economic disparities and proposes 12 national "missions" across four broad areas:

- Boosting productivity and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging.
- Spreading opportunities and improving public services, especially in those areas where they are weakest.
- Restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost.
- Empowering local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.

# Agenda Item 10.

The White Paper also commits the Government to further consultation on the metrics used to measure the success of its 12 'missions', and to create a statutory responsibility on Government to report on their progress. This includes the establishment of a new independent data body to monitor the Government's progress, and a new Levelling Up Advisory Council to support its policy approach

To deliver upon this commitment, the White Paper sets out a new framework for devolution for England, seeking to enable local areas to better realise their own economic and social potential. This includes new opportunities to enhance economic growth and innovation, to invest in additional skills and employment activity, to support regeneration across the Country's towns, cities and rural/coastal areas, and reshape national investment programmes to meet local priorities.

Crucially, the new framework extends the offer of devolution beyond metropolitan areas for the first time, setting out pathways to a deal for every area of England that wants one. The framework is underpinned by four fundamental principles that Government wishes to pursue through its renewed devolution approach: effective leadership, sensible geography, flexibility, and appropriate accountability.

The Government has initially invited nine areas: Cornwall; Derbyshire and Derby; **Devon, Plymouth and Torbay**; Durham; Hull and East Yorkshire; Leicestershire; Norfolk; Nottinghamshire and Nottingham; and Suffolk to start formal negotiations to agree these new 'County Deals'.

The White Paper sets out the types of powers and functions that will be considered for each of three devolution levels. Some powers will only be available to certain authorities or geographies but there will be scope to negotiate further powers on a case-by-case basis.

The pan-Devon area will be a Level 2 area where a County Deal could devolve powers such as control of appropriate local transport functions, ability to introduce bus franchising, the ability to provide input into Local Skills Improvement Plans, and Homes England compulsory purchase powers.

Devon County Council, the eight district councils, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council have welcomed the Secretary of State's decision to enter into negotiations. This is an opportunity for us to get powers and flexibilities we need to do more to tackle inequalities, improve social mobility and invest in economic growth and skills, and contribute to levelling up.

There is a reasonably good match between what we hope to achieve through a Deal and what is on offer to Level 2 areas. We particularly welcome the Government's initial options around community investment, employment and training, sustainable transport, and business support, each of which could play a stronger role in meeting our priorities as a Council. However, we will want to go further on some issues – particularly on housing, climate change, skills, and health and care.

We will be talking with Ministers and officials over coming weeks to and move ahead as quickly as we can. I will ensure that all Members are kept updated with progress.

## 2. Race Equality Audit Report - Understanding and Addressing Structural Racism in Devon County Council”

Members will recall that making Devon a fairer and more equal county is one of the six priorities in the [Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025](#) which we adopted at the end of last year.

The Race Equality Audit was commissioned by the Leadership Group as a way of helping the Council understand the nature and impact of structural racism within the organisation so that it can be addressed. The objectives were to provide an honest assessment of how it feels for Black and Asian colleagues to work for Devon County Council, to challenge assumptions and advise on actions to ensure DCC becomes a place where Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse staff feel safe, included and welcomed. The audit was carried out by three consultants: Kalkidan Legesse MBA, Maia Thomas and Sandhya Dave.

The Chief Executive and I sent a link to the 30 page Race Equality Audit report to all Members on 26 January 2022. It is available, together with the accompanying summary infographic, at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/equality/performance-and-monitoring/raceaudit21>

The report’s recommendations are set out under six themes:

- Denial of Racism.
- ‘Small Numbers’ Rhetoric.
- “No Data” Excuse.
- White Fragility in Leadership.
- Lack of Sufficient and Consistent Leadership for Diversity and Inclusion.
- Unwelcoming Culture for Black and Asian People.

The overall findings make for some hard and uncomfortable reading. They are a stark wake-up call for all of us that racism still exists to an unacceptable extent in our country, in our county, and regrettably, within our Council. I am clear that we all need to do more to ensure Black, Asian and other Ethnically Diverse staff feel included and are able to express their needs and experiences safely. We all share a responsibility to challenge racist behaviour and call out racism within DCC and our local communities. To that end I am committed to eliminating discrimination, providing equality of opportunity and challenging prejudice.

The report highlights four areas for immediate focus:

- Provide clear guidance on the process of investigating incidents of racial discrimination to all stakeholders.
- Employ a diverse and skilled Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team, with Black/ Asian/Ethnically Diverse backgrounds, to work alongside the Lead EDI officer in implementing the recommendations of this report and wider equality priorities.
- Implement appropriate racial grievance channels, enabling staff to raise concerns independent of line manager.
- Let’s Explore Race mentoring programme to be made available to all management within DCC.

# Agenda Item 10.

The Cabinet and Leadership Group support the report and have accepted its findings. The proposed 2022/23 budget includes provision for additional investment in equality, diversity and inclusion. I have asked the Chief Executive to report to the Cabinet on 13 April 2022 on how that resource will be used to implement the report's recommendations and strengthen the Council's ability to challenge inequality and celebrate diversity.

All Members will be invited to participate in a discussion about the roles they can play in implementing the recommendations. Those sessions will be an important opportunity for Members to explore and fully understand the audit's findings and I urge all Members to participate.

Scrutiny committees will also have an important part to play in oversight of progress with implementing the recommendations to ensure that the Council is the best possible employer and service provider to everyone.

### **3. Landscape Recovery Scheme**

The Landscape Recovery Scheme is one of three new environmental land management schemes announced by government as part of its Agricultural Transition Plan (2021 to 2024). Together these form part of the shift away from direct subsidy payments to farmers and landowners, which provides scope to support agriculture in new ways. There are three levels of support: Sustainable Farm Incentive, Local Nature Recovery scheme and the Landscape Recovery scheme which is a competitive fund to facilitate landscape-scale and ecosystem changes through a small number of large projects.

Defra is planning to open applications for Landscape Recovery pilot projects in at least two rounds over the next two years, with up to 15 projects supported through the first of these. The first of these opened early in February and is open to any individuals or groups who want to come together to deliver large (500 – 5,000 hectare) scale projects, to be split between the two targeted themes. (Recovery and restoring England's threatened native species and restoring England's streams and rivers)

The application deadline is 24 May.

Through our role on the Devon Local Nature Partnership (DLNP) we are supporting organisations to apply and work together to submit applications and provide signposting and information to support their applications.

Through the partnership network DCC County Farms have the opportunity to collaborate with potential lead partners (larger landowners across the County)

DCC Farms estate (dispersed across the County) does not have the areas of land eligible for the scheme to be a lead partner in the bid but could engage with other stakeholders through the DLNP forum to consider inclusion in the overall bid.

#### **Councillor John Hart**

Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate and Asset Management

**Report of the Cabinet Member for  
Public Health, Communities and Equality**

**Introduction**

I will be reporting as follows for Full Council on 17 February 2022:

**1. by Councillor Hannaford as follows:**

On the current Afghan Refugee Resettlement Scheme.

**2. by Councillor Dewhirst as follows:**

Please can the Cabinet Member report on the use of Coronavirus vaccines in Devon. Please can he report on the number of vaccines available in our Local Authority area per month during the last six months; the number of vaccines administered per month during the last six months and the number of vaccines that were not administered for any reason per month and what happened to them.

**Response**

**1. Afghan Resettlement Scheme**

Hotel Bridging Accommodation

The Council, alongside key partners, continue to oversee and support two temporary bridging hotels within the county. Exmouth, which commenced on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2021 and Exeter, which commenced on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2021. We currently have 118 residents in bridging accommodation (Exmouth 22 adults and 32 children, Exeter 38 adults and 26 children). 12 individuals have left local bridging hotels for secure accommodation within Devon and across the UK.

Establishing a multi-disciplinary team to oversee both hotels has allowed for strong and effective collaboration to meet the presenting needs of families. We have appointed two providers from the voluntary sector to be based within each hotel and operate a 'help desk' arrangement for families to raise questions/problems at the earliest opportunity.

All families are registered with a local GP, able to access prescribing and engaged within a wider range of health testing such as Tuberculosis screening. Public Health Nursing continue to have a weekly presence in each hotel so families can discuss their health concerns and for babies' health and wellbeing to be monitored. There is an ambition to establish a Women's Health Clinic at both hotels to empower residents

to discuss their own health and know how to take care for their own health needs. Children and young people are enrolled and attending nursery, primary, secondary and post 16 provision with feedback suggesting transitions have gone extremely well. Adults are also engaged with local ESOL provision, often several times a week to help them to learn or practice their English.

Job Centre Plus continue to maintain regular engagement with all adult arrivals, which started with supporting Universal Credit claims. To date there have been:

- Thirteen job starts mainly in farming/production roles but also cleaning, logistics and South West Water;
- Seventeen Sector Based Work Academies starts in Security and Veterinary;
- Fourteen sign ups to the Health & Social Care Skills Accelerator Programme;
- Twelve engagements with Learn Devon;
- Eight appointments with National Carers Service to support with employability skills.

Home Office have advised the Council of their intention to extend both hotels for a further six months, which could see further arrivals from other hotels or direct from overseas.

### Resettlement

DCC and Devon's district councils continue to seek appropriate and affordable housing to meet local pledges towards the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme.

To date we have welcomed the arrival of one family in the Teignbridge area and two families in the Exeter area. Families receive three years funded resettlement support which is offered through a local voluntary sector organisation. The focus of this support is enabling the family to integrate into their new area/environment and create links with health, education and employment provision.

Finally, we have started a local matching process which links hotel residents who wish to stay living in Devon to local homes offered to the schemes. We have been able to locally match two families to date and will continue in our endeavour to local match where we can, but many families wish to move to large cities such as London, Birmingham and Manchester because of family connections.

## **2. Coronavirus Vaccines**

The Cabinet Member will provide a verbal update.

**Councillor Roger Croad**

Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality

**Report of the Cabinet Member  
Children's Services and Schools**

I have been asked to Report as follows for Full Council on 17 February 2022:

**1. By Councillor Letch as follows:**

Since the government is moving towards a central register of home educated children, I would welcome a report from the relevant Cabinet member to focus on the following.

1. How do children get on DCC's register (if there is one)?
2. What are the figures for EHE pupils for the past 5 years?
3. How is the suitability and quality of their education checked; by whom?
4. How is their physical and mental wellbeing monitored?
5. What records do we have of academic attainment (GCSE/A Levels)?

**2. By Councillor Adams as follows:**

Could the Cabinet member for Children's Services please provide a report on what progress is being made to deal with the backlog in processing EHCP requests and to cover in particular:

- Expected timescales for children and parents requesting EHCPs from initial application and how the present waiting list is being prioritised?
- How does Devon County Council propose to meet the need to increase the number of Educational Psychologists, that are essential and lacking, to complete the backlog of EHCPs?

**Response**

**1. Elective Home Education**

**1. How do children get on DCC's register (if there is one)?**

While there is currently no legislation to require parents who have chosen to Electively Home Educate their children to register their child with the Local Authority, there is a statutory requirement for schools to notify the Local Authority when a child is removed from their school roll. All children of compulsory school age who have attended school and then become home educated are therefore automatically registered with Devon's Elective Home Education (EHE) Service so contact can be made with parents.

In addition to this:

- Parents can voluntarily make contact with the Local Authority or the EHE Service and request their child is registered as EHE, for example those who have never been to school.

- We also receive notifications from other Local Authorities about EHE children moving into Devon.
- Some parents who have not registered may confirm their child is being Electively Home Educated when contacted by the Children Missing Education Officer. Checks are then made on the appropriateness of the education being provided.
- In Devon there are approximately 173 who have not been registered as EHE, this includes those as not yet of statutory school age. **On 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2022 the government confirmed that they will go ahead with the creation of a mandatory register for children not in school at the earliest available legislative opportunity.**

## 2. What are the figures for EHE children for the past 5 years?

### Census data

Every year in October schools across the country are required to record the number of pupils they have on their school rolls (Census day). From October 2018 EHE data has also been recorded in this way.

	04/10/18	03/10/19	01/10/20	07/10/21
<b>Number of EHE children - registered</b>	<b>1126</b>	<b>1238</b>	<b>1508</b>	<b>1519</b>
Number of girls	538	571	732	741
Number of boys	583	663	773	776
Number of primary age pupils				662
Number of Secondary age pupils				857

There was a significant increase in EHE case numbers in October 2020, partly attributable to concerns relating to Covid as well as parents choosing Home Education as a positive lifestyle choice following successfully home schooling at the start of the pandemic. Over the course of the 20/21 academic year over 600 children stopped being Electively Home Educated and returned to school, with support from our EHE team.

## 3. How is the suitability and quality of their education checked; by whom?

Devon County Council commissions Babcock LDP to provide an EHE Service. There are 5 designated EHE Advisers who provide advice and support to home educating families and assess the suitability of the EHE provision. Home visits are offered by the team and many parents choose this option to demonstrate they are delivering a suitable home education provision. However, there is no legal requirement to accept a home visit or for the child to be seen and therefore some parents choose to provide their own report as evidence instead.

Further advice for Parents Home Educating is provided on the Website [Babcock LDP - Elective Home Education information and guidance](#)

## 4. How is their physical and mental wellbeing monitored?

The EHE team do not routinely monitor physical and mental well-being of EHE children. However, all new EHE families are allocated an EHE Adviser to provide advice and support and in cases where any issues are identified the EHE Family Support Worker would also provide support.

Support may include signposting / referring to relevant services e.g. School Nursing Service, Young Devon, GP, CAMHS, Family Intervention Team and being part of a Team around the Family (TAF). Any safeguarding concerns would also be referred to the safeguarding team.

## **5. What records do we have of academic attainment (GCSE/A Levels)?**

We do not hold any records of academic attainment for EHE students.

The requirement for a parent Electively Home Educating their children is that they provide education that is appropriate for their age, aptitude and ability. There is no legal requirement for EHE students to take public examinations and whilst some do sit GCSE examinations many defer this until post-16. There are several reasons for deferring the exams including:

- The significant cost. Parents assume full financial responsibility for their child's education when home educating, which includes the exam fee entries (that can be in the region of £200 per subject when entering as an external candidate).
- Parents may not have the expertise required to suitably prepare their child to sit public examinations.
- Parents may experience difficulty in identifying a suitable exam centre willing to accept external candidates.

Some Further Education Colleges offer 14-16 provision for EHE students which includes the opportunity of sitting GCSE English and Maths, however, the offer is not guaranteed and is not available in all areas of the county.

The EHE team and CSW work closely to support Year 11 EHE students, particularly those identified as being at a higher risk of becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), as they consider post-16 options.

## **2. Education, Health and Care Plans**

The recently appointed new Deputy and SEND Strategic Director has started to create a backlog team of experienced virtual interims to oversee the outstanding annual reviews. Agreement has already been given for 18 temporary staff but current recruiting has focused on temporary interims with experience and agencies have been contacted to recruit an interim backlog team to start work as soon as possible. Four individuals have been recruited so far, the first starting this week.

The Waiting List is prioritised according to statutory guidance. Years 6 to 7 children transferring between phase, (by 15th February) and then post-16 (by 31st March), and Children in Care. The timescales should be 20 weeks but at the moment there is a significant waiting list for Educational Psychologist (EP) assessments. For 77% of assessments completed, there has been an average of an 11 week delay, and 23% are not yet allocated. Measures have been taken but this cannot compensate for the need for EP input.

As a result of a national and local shortage of Educational Psychologists (EPs), a reduction in their capacity from illness or isolation due to the high number of Covid cases in the area and as a result of continued high levels of demand for EP advice for first assessments and amendments the timeliness of statutory assessments has sadly worsened. Currently there is not enough EP resource across the county to complete the essential and legally required advice for the EHC assessments in a timely way. This has not only affected Devon but has had significant impact on services across the country.

In order to improve timeliness and mitigate, as far as possible, the impact of delays in access to EP support or their advice we have put in place an action plan. However, this does not support EHC Assessment being timely. Alongside this, detailed monitoring of advice received occurs on a weekly basis. This is reported internally and to the DfE monthly.

Current actions to improve timeliness include:

- Schools have been asked if EPs employed directly by schools would be prepared to undertake the assessments required, funded by the Local Authority.
- We have contacted over 90 external agencies for consultant support to provide further ongoing capacity: this resulted in us being able to secure additional work that can address the assessments of 100 children. This low number reflects the national position.
- Made as much use as possible of parents' private EP reports to see if these can be used, or expanded, to meet the statutory requirements.
- Put in place clear expectations and weekly monitoring of EP allocations and returns of advice to maintain a level of completion that is appropriate for the EP capacity we do have.
- Approved and put out advert recruitment for 5 new Psychology Assistants to help the EPs complete advice.
- Instigated a campaign to attract more EPs to work in Devon: Educational Psychology Service Devon - Come and work with us!
- Recognised the impact of the cost of housing on recruitment across Education, Health and Care and moved to take action at County level with cross party support.

We have also taken steps to mitigate the impact of the delays on children and schools. This includes:

- Putting extra funding in schools for children if their EHCP assessment is taking longer than 20 weeks.
- Asked schools to talk to parents where we have not yet amended plans, about any immediate changes that might help and they can let us know how we could support.
- Made more information about support available on the Local Offer Devon's SEND Local Offer.
- It may be of interest to note that the number of children we have with EHCP plans in Devon is considerably higher than the national average (4.7% compared to 3.9%).

**Andrew Leadbetter**

Cabinet Member

Children's Services and Schools

## Report of the Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery and Skills

I will be reporting as follows for Full Council on 17 February 2022:

### 1. By Councillor Hannaford as follows:

Can I please request a cabinet member report on the decision to appoint administrators at Midas? Specifically, the potential 1,000 or more local job losses, and the effect on our local contractors, subcontractors, manufacturers and supply chains.

What effect will this have on our local apprenticeship programmes, and how can we working with other education and training providers support young people, who may see their progress delayed or disrupted?

Do we know the potential effects on our school buildings, including those no longer under council control. Also, what does this mean for Devon County Council, in terms of our own capital programme, repair works, and regeneration initiatives. Including those in partnership with other key partners?

### 2. By Councillor Hannaford as follows:

Brixham has been recently chosen to pioneer a new banking system which helps small towns cope with the closure of their High Street bank branches. It will be one of just five towns in England and Scotland to take part in the project, with the announcement being hailed as a 'Godsend' for the town. Brixham will get a banking 'hub' run by the Post Office at which customers of any bank can access their accounts, deposit cash and cheques and withdraw money.

The new banking hub will be available for everyone in the community to use, whichever brand they bank with, and will be funded entirely by the major banks. Detailed inquiries are dealt with by a representative from one of the major banks who each visit once a week. Brixham was identified by the banks' own Cash Action Group as being in need of better access to cash and basic banking following the closure of its last remaining bank - Lloyds - earlier in 2021.

The banking hub concept has been trialed over the past year in Essex and Lanarkshire, and has proved popular with customers and small businesses.

Numerous communities across Devon no longer have any proper access to banks, with digital connectivity often poor and the drive for a cashless society excluding and penalising those in poverty.

What work can be done by Devon County Council, working with the government , financial sector, and other key partners to help develop a new Post Office Banking Hubs network across Devon to secure financial and monetary inclusivity for individuals, community groups, charities and local businesses.

## **Response**

### **1. Midas Administration**

Devon County Council recognises the difficult situation for the local economy in terms of the collapse of Midas Construction and its closely associated business Mi-Space. Since Councillor Hannaford rightly raised this question, further developments in the situation have and continue to occur, which we are continuing to monitor. Therefore, my response is current at the time of publication.

My understanding is that:

- Midas Construction and Mi-Space have gone into administration with Francis Clark as the appointed administrator, who have been actively seeking buyers for the business.
- Mi-Space provided maintenance services for a range of local authorities and social housing landlords.
- Within the Devon County Council area the direct jobs of people employed by Midas and Mi-Space according to our most recent data was 213 (180 in Exeter and 33 in Newton Abbot).
- There were a further 32 direct jobs in Plymouth and 9 in Paignton. The business also employed people directly at Indian Queens in Cornwall, Bristol and in Hampshire.
- Media reports have noted that the Mi-Space business has been acquired by Bell Construction saving a number of jobs (currently mooted as 46)
- It is likely that the bigger risk impact in terms of employment losses will be to sub-contractors, of which Devon County Council (DCC) understands there are a significant number (total figure as yet unknown) – the majority of these being small and micro businesses. Job losses are expected to be in excess of those directly employed by Midas and Mi-Space.
- We are yet to ascertain what debts, if any, the Midas group of companies may have left, including to their supply chain and if so what, if any impacts there may be
- Midas Construction was a contractor on the Southern Construction Framework (SCF). Across the SCF geography there are 14 projects across South and South-West England, where Midas was working in either Preconstruction, Construction or Defects. The SCF team are liaising individually with these clients.
- DCC has no contractual liabilities with Midas in relation to these SCF contracts.
- DCC does not have any current live projects or projects remaining in the defects period with Midas
- We understand that there are no live contracts within the DCC area
- A build at Exeter Science Park, which was built by Midas has been completed and fully signed over.
- Midas was a main build delivery partner for Teignbridge and North Devon Councils, but with no live projects as we understand.
- Midas was also a main delivery build partner for Torbay Council outside of the DCC area, with live projects.
- One academy school in Devon had selected Midas as 'preferred bidder' for a scheme. This contract had not been let before the collapse of the firm and therefore we currently understand that there was no contractual obligation engaged.

- Warranties related to Midas Construction buildings are at risk
- As regards apprentices DCC does not yet have data on how many are likely to be affected and will monitor this situation, including liaising with the Further Education and Training Provider sector. As with previous administrations in the sector, however, partners will be seeking to engage with and redeploy any affected apprentices where practicable.
- An Employment Support Session for Midas colleagues and those affected in the supply chain has been arranged for Thursday 17 February – with representatives from CITB, Building Plymouth, Building Greater Exeter, Build Torbay and Building Cornwall, and DWP to be present. DCC in its role as the LEP's Employment and Skills lead is engaged with this initiative.

## 2. Post Office Hubs

Devon County Council recognises the need for the County's people, businesses and organisations to be able to physically access banking facilities and cash, including the need to access paying-in facilities and banking and financial advice. We recognise this is essential to the smooth functioning of many businesses in our economy.

On 26th April 2019 the Council's Economy, Enterprise and Skills team responded directly to an evidence request for the inquiry into the Postal Network by the UK Government's Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.

Within our response which provided evidence on a range of post office roles and opportunities across Devon we also specifically referenced the Banking function that could be provided and enhanced through the Post Office Network. We flagged specific items to the Committee including:

- Government recognition of the disproportionate impact that Post Office and banking closures and movements of post offices have on other local retail and service hierarchies, including downstream effects on local service provision; the wider public sector costs of sustaining small communities and business rates revenues in Local Authorities.
- Recognising the very significant number of personal and business customers who continue to use physical banking services across the country, particularly in rural and coastal areas such as Devon (evidence provided) and the market opportunity this provides for the Post Office network.
- Recognising the strong supporting role that Post Offices have in supporting global digital and internet-based commerce and trading by smaller UK based companies. This is especially relevant to the large number of small and micro businesses based across Devon, many of whom will continue to need to access physical banking facilities to undertake part of their business.
- Recognising the unique role and opportunity for Post Offices to act as a single service provision centre within many communities, offering both postal, financial and retail service in locations increasingly devoid of wider competition. This would provide critical mass to bolster the role of all of these functions under one umbrella.
- Government should consider the very strong central role that Crown Post Offices have in maintaining the economic vibrancy and footfall in town and city centres and supporting other businesses and local Business Rates revenues.

- The significant role Post Offices play as lynchpin organisations within many village and rural / coastal settings
- The Post Office network across Devon at present remains fairly comprehensive. A number of small to medium sized towns (up to around 14,000 population) in Devon have, however, been left with no single high street retail bank and the Post Office remains as the only feasible local provider of banking services. Around 30 retail bank branch closures have occurred in Devon over the past few years. Mobile banking van provision is patchy and often visits one town for around 1 hour per week, at times that are often not convenient for either personal, or business customers.

In particular we noted that:

- Many Post Offices that are not designated Banking Hubs already perform a basic banking function such as allowing cash withdrawals and taking deposits for a wide range of banks.
- Retail banks such as Barclays and Natwest have specifically advised customers to shift to using the Post Office for banking transactions when closing branches.
- Opportunities exist for the Post Office to work more closely with the wider bank sector on extending services within harder to reach communities, filling a void left by the loss of more traditional high street banking networks.

Devon County Council continues to be very supportive of the role that Post-Offices and especially co-located banking facilities have for communities and businesses across the whole County and would welcome the provision of further Banking Hubs, should the pilot in places such as Brixham prove to be successful.

As well as being supportive in principle of the setting up of Banking Hubs where demand allows, the Council also wishes to highlight the current good work also being undertaken locally by a number of co-operatives, credit unions and mutuals which include:

1. West Country Savings and Loans for example. This has 3,000 members around the area and offers a mixture of savings, ethical lending and banking products at the community level <https://www.westcountry.org.uk/>
2. City of Plymouth Credit Union <https://cpcu.co.uk>

**Councillor Rufus Gilbert**

Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery and Skills

## **Report of the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport**

### **Introduction**

I have been asked to report to full Council as follows:

#### **By Councillor Whitton on:**

“...the Council’s plans to support and improve bus services across the county should the current bid for funding under the Bus Improvement Plan be unsuccessful, given the widely reported decision by the Government to reduce the total pot of money available to local authorities from £3bn to £1.4bn.”

### **Response**

#### **Plans to support and improve bus services**

Since we submitted our Bus Services Improvement Plan at the end of October 2021, the Department for Transport has been reviewing the 79 plans received by all Local Transport Authorities in England. This review has now been completed and we have been informed that the Department is now prioritising the proposals for funding.

From this prioritisation we understand that:

1. A number of LTAs will be allocated indicative funding to deliver all or most of the aspirations set out in their Plans
2. A further set of LTAs will be allocated indicative funding which will be less than sought in their Plans
3. A third group will not be allocated funding but will be supported to develop their plans for any future funding or investment streams.

We expect to hear the outcome for Devon by the end of February.

Local bus service patronage has returned to around 70% of pre-pandemic levels and the shortfall is currently supported by a Bus Recovery Grant until the end of March. I am concerned about the impact of this grant coming to an end as recovery in passenger numbers has stalled due to the Omicron variant of COVID-19. Therefore, I have written to both the Secretary of State for Transport and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport to ask that they consider continuing this funding for at least a further 6 months. This will give time for further recovery in passenger numbers and planning for the outcomes from the National Bus Strategy bid.

While we wait for a response from the Department on both the Recovery Funding and our Improvement Plan, officers from our Transport Coordination Service are working with bus companies on the impact on the current bus networks from the various funding outcomes possible over the next couple of months. Our long-term aim is to still improve our public transport network to provide a sustainable transport solution. But in the short term we need to ensure as much of the existing network is retained if Government funding is not forthcoming.

**Councillor Andrea Davis**

Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport

## **Report of the Cabinet Member for Highway Management**

### **Introduction**

I have been asked to report to full Council by Councillor Connett on the following:

1. Arrangements and any fees to be charged for community-requested street closures for events to mark and celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.
2. Progress on delivering the A379 highway and pedestrian improvements at Starcross
3. Progress with estimated dates for delivery for the improved cycle path connecting Kennford with Exeter, via the new development at South West Exeter

And by Councillor Dewhirst as follows:

4. On progress towards supporting the safety of young people from the Deaf Academy in Douglas Road, Exmouth whilst they are using the highway outside their school. The Cabinet Member will remember that the young people petitioned for a 20 mph speed limit outside their school last year. The vulnerable young people cannot understand why other schools in Exmouth have a 20 mph speed limit outside their schools but they have to contend with a very wide and fast road outside their school.

### **Response**

#### **1. The Queen's Platinum Jubilee - events and road closures**

6 weeks' notice is required if any events are planned to be held on the public highway.

If a community wants to hold a street party they will need to apply for a temporary traffic restriction to close the road.

There is no charge for a temporary traffic restriction to close a minor road for these events. If no waiting cones are needed these will need to be arranged via a third party contractor. Only a suitable insured and trained person may place signs or cones on the highway.

The application form is available online [Application for The Big Lunch/National Celebration](#)

## **2. Progress on A379 highway and pedestrian improvements at Starcross**

Starcross improvements were approved by Teignbridge HATOC in July 2021 and the traffic orders were advertised in the Autumn. These have since been approved to progress. The trial footway widening is planned to take place in Spring, with permanent elements of the scheme to be tied in with the resurfacing of the A379, which is planned for Summer 2022.

## **3. Progress on improved cycle path connecting Kennford with Exeter**

The improvements to the cyclepath between Kennford and Exeter was linked to Park and Ride plans at Peamore; however, at the current time there are no timescales for progressing this scheme. Park and Ride bus services have suffered during the pandemic and have not recovered well with use below 50% as a result of changing commuter patterns. With Park and Ride capacity available on this corridor at the Matford Park and Ride, we are being cautious about progressing plans for a new site at the current time and so are not actively pursuing plans. However, the Exeter Transport Strategy 2020-2030 identifies the need to support active travel from villages on the edge of the city into Exeter and most recently we have approved a scheme to improve linkages from Ide into Exeter and have a live bid to Government for funds to link Woodbury to the Exe Estuary. We will seek out future funding opportunities to deliver the Kennford to Exeter improvements.

## **4. 20 mph zone outside Schools: Douglas Avenue**

Surveys were undertaken on Douglas Avenue in July 2021 which included a speed survey and traffic counts, including pedestrian surveys. Our Engineering Design Group are reviewing the data and considering road safety options. In addition, Wig Wag signals have been ordered for erection on Douglas Avenue as a short term measure.

Town Council and Division members are to be asked to identify the extent of their desired 20 mph limit, identifying community support and alignment to our assessment criteria, as outlined in the members briefing that was recently issued. I can assure you that Douglas Avenue will form a part of the local elected members consideration.

**Councillor Stuart Hughes**  
**Cabinet Member for Highway Management**