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**DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL**

To: Members of Devon County Council

County Hall  
Exeter  
EX2 4QD

30 November 2022

Your attendance is requested at the Meeting of the Devon County Council to be held at County Hall, Exeter on Thursday, 8th December, 2022 at 2.15 pm.

Chief Executive

## **AGENDA**

**7. Questions from Members of the Council (Pages 1 - 8)**

Answers to questions from Members of the Council pursuant to Standing Order 17.





## **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CABINET MEMBERS**

**Thursday 8 December 2022**

### **1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BRAZIL Re: Introduction of new traffic sign**

What are the possibilities of introducing a new official traffic sign that warns drivers to ignore their satnavs, narrow and windy lanes ahead?

#### **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES**

All signs available for use on the highway are included in The Traffic Signs and General Directions 2016.

A sign is included in the regulations which advises drivers of HGV's that the route ahead is unsuitable for their passage. This sign is a rectangular sign with a blue background, featuring a white lorry with a red stripe across it. The sign requires no TRO.

No equivalent sign exists for other vehicles in the regulations. The introduction of the suggested sign has been debated several times nationally and dismissed. It is possible to apply for special dispensation to introduce a sign not included in the regulations, however, the advice is that approval for this suggestion will be very unlikely to succeed.

Where issues have been known to exist and cause a problem across the County, it would be helpful if members of the public advised their delivery drivers or visitors not to follow sat navs but use a specific route.

### **2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ADAMS Re: Report on Stagecoach and improvements to services**

Is the Cabinet member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport satisfied with the outcome of the Traffic Commissioners report on Stagecoach? How does she anticipate future improvements to services for the residents of Devon following the inquiry?

#### **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS**

The Public Inquiry was convened by the Traffic Commissioner. I respect his decision and observations and thank him for the time he spent listening to

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witnesses and examining the evidence provided. With regards to the compensation Stagecoach were requested to pay, this was in line with the maximum amount the Traffic Commissioner has in his authority to request, and I am pleased he ordered this to be spent to the benefit of bus passengers and not issued as a fine.

I hope that through the establishment of Devon County Council's Enhanced Partnership with our bus operators, we will continue working with Stagecoach to ensure lost mileage returns to a minimal level, and in turn residents can expect a more reliable and dependable bus service.

**3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR AVES**  
**Re: Plan for Children's Centres**

Devon County Councillors support Early Intervention for families in need. Our Children's Centres run by Action 4 Children reduces the cost for our children's services by acting quickly and with expertise to address concerns within our families at an early stage. Thousands of our residents need their support. What is the plan for our children's centres?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER**

Councillor Leadbetter will respond verbally.

**4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY**  
**Re: Report on independent investigation**

DCC committed to publish its independent investigation into disgraced former Conservative Councillor John Humphreys in the autumn. When will the report be published?

At the recent cabinet meeting I asked that the portfolio holder confirm that the full independent investigation into John Humphreys be published. However, the portfolio holder declined to confirm this. What justification is there for not publishing the report in full.

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER**

Councillor Leadbetter will respond verbally.

**5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY**  
**Re: Ambulance delays in the South West**

In light of the latest shocking revelations surrounding ambulance delays in the South West does the Portfolio Holder for Health and Adult Care agree with me that an urgent update should be brought to the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny

Committee on the progress made in implementing the recommendations made in the Ambulance Spotlight Review in June 2022.

## **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

I am sure that every Councillor in this room is concerned with ambulance delays and at the time this Report was presented to Cabinet, the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee was thanked for its Spotlight Review and we agreed to take forward the Report and co-ordinate progress towards the objectives and recommendations, engaging the NHS and other partners and stakeholders as necessary.

We also recommended that a progress report be taken to the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee in six months' time.

However, Cabinet should not dictate the work program of the Scrutiny Committees, but I have taken the liberty of checking with the Scrutiny Chair and the Scrutiny Team and can advise that SWAST Spotlight Review update report is on the work programme and is scheduled for January 2023.

## **6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ATKINSON** **Re: Investment zones**

This will now focus on areas with research strengths centred on universities and left behind areas in need of levelling up. There was no indication by Government of which localities are likely to benefit, but the recent call for projects by Government, to which Devon County Council submitted a package of proposals from across the County has been scrapped. It is reported separately in the FT that Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove is pushing for a series of “transformational” housing-led urban regeneration projects across the country instead. Further announcements will be made before the next budget scheduled for Spring 2023

Can the Cabinet Member for Economic Recover and Skills tell us how much staff time was invested in the preparing the proposals that were scrapped and what level of investment this amounts to with respect to wages and other resources?

## **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR GILBERT**

Time spent across the EES service in working with districts and putting the Investment Zones response together totalled an estimated 23 days at a cost of £7000.

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Although the exercise was not successful it has enabled us to put together a pipeline of potential projects for future funding. We have agreed with Team Devon partners to work with them to ensure the pipeline covers further potential schemes across Devon.

No further resources such as printing or design were used. The Expression of Interest had to be submitted via a government portal spreadsheet.

## **7. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR WHITTON** **Re: Action to address issues with speeding on roads**

Can the Cabinet Member for Highways give a view on how Devon might follow the example of Wandsworth in taking action to address issues with speeding on our roads?

### **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES**

In May this year new legislation was introduced that allows English authorities, outside of London, to take up additional powers of enforcement for moving traffic regulations under Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004. And Cabinet resolved in November to support the submission of an application to the DfT to acquire these powers next year.

New powers will enable DCC to consider enforcing a range of additional moving traffic offences. But if taken up, they will not allow DCC to undertake speed enforcement. Within DCC it is only Devon & Cornwall police that have powers to enforce speeding as a moving traffic offence.

At Wandsworth with the support of both the Metropolitan Police and the London Council. The Borough Council pilot scheme is being delivered under civil powers though the London Local Authorities and Transport for London Act 2003. To enforce this pilot, Wandsworth are using conventional fixed Home Office type approved (HOTA) speed cameras to detect offences within two 20mph areas and are issuing penalty charge notice fines to offending drivers.

Speed cameras are operated on the DCC road network and modern HOTA speed cameras are capable of being used within all speed restricted areas, including 20mph limits. The cameras used on our roads are provided and owned by DCC as the local highway authority and are operated by Devon & Cornwall police as the authority with the powers to enforce speeding offences.

Although DCC is not legally able to follow the example being set by Wandsworth, with the support of Devon & Cornwall Police through the Vision Zero South West partnership, DCC can still choose to fund the introduction of speed cameras

anywhere on our road network. Within DCC the primary use of speed cameras is always focussed on reducing serious road injuries at sites with a speed related casualty issue, but if DCC is prepared to underwrite the operating costs to the partnership, then there is still an ability for DCC to fund speed camera schemes to help address other issues like community concern or to support highway improvement schemes. By delivering camera enforcement through the police, this enables the partnership to offer driver education as an alternative to receiving license points for many speeding offences. The ability to deliver education can be a more effective way to change driver behaviour in the longer term than issuing fines.

## 8. **QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON**

### **Re: Bus Services**

Now that DCC has entered into an Enhanced Partnership arrangement with the Bus Companies operating in Devon:

(a) What influence and powers will be available to DCC officers to seek improved standards to address the considerable on-going problems with bus services. These problems include frequent cancellations of bus services (particularly late services), failure to stop at poorly marked bus stops, last minute changes to routes, lack of bus shelters, lack of proper consultation and adequate notification when services are to be closed and night-time closure of Bus Stations which result in long-distance buses dropping people off and needing to await connections during the night in quiet side-streets?

(b) Will there be a detailed review of bus services and routes to check what level of overall coverage is currently available to the public.

(c) Now that we seem to be beyond the worst of COVID, will there be a promotional campaign to get more people back on buses as a sustainable form of transport that can help us address air quality issues in residential and urban areas and improve our response to the climate emergency?

(d) Are there any plans for the bus fleets to bring in smaller and electric vehicles to reduce the air pollutants from diesel buses?

### **REPLIES BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS**

(a) DCC officers will retain the same powers as they do now. However, the Enhanced Partnership will be able to set and control a wide range of local standards relating to bus services. The Enhanced Partnership Board will meet quarterly and includes representatives from both our majority and smaller operators.

We are also setting up a Bus Users & Stakeholder (BUS) Forum which will enable us to gather views and identify current issues from bus user groups and other key stakeholders. The Partnership will also be developing a Passenger

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Charter which will go towards improving the provision of information management for passengers.

As part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) capital funding from the DfT, the Enhanced Partnership will be making improvements to bus stop infrastructure throughout the county. This includes improving facilities at bus stops and bus stations, as well as real time and printed information.

The market town bus stations are controlled by the district/town councils. Exeter Bus Station is controlled by Stagecoach. Again, as part of the BSIP capital funding for the Enhanced Partnership, the Highways Team are piloting a project to enhance the streetlighting around bus stops in Exeter which is aimed at improving passenger safety and confidence.

When the BSIP was developed in 2021 there was an extensive review of the level of bus service for communities throughout the county. The BSIP document aspired to have set levels of bus service dependent on the size of the community. Unfortunately, the BSIP financial allocation for enhancing services was very limited and we will have only a few bus enhancement projects in the county.

(b) Within the DCC revenue budget, the allocated spend on a supported bus service is based on current patronage levels and not the size of the community the bus serves. This approach focusses spend on supported services where it is needed. We regularly monitor patronage levels on bus services. The level of coverage and frequency of our bus services is displayed most clearly on our interactive bus map: [Devon Public Transport Map \(cartogold.co.uk\)](http://cartogold.co.uk)

(c) Yes – absolutely. We have only just received our allocation of funding from the DfT (within the last few weeks). Our BSIP clearly outlines our plans for the promotion of bus services across the county. We fully intend to continue with an extension to the marketing campaign we ran previously in 2021 [Back on the Bus Campaign 2021 - Travel Devon](#). We hope, now that the situation with Stagecoach's driver recruitment/retention and lost mileage is improving, we will be best placed to proceed with this campaign, and really highlight to people how they can make a step change in their travel planning, and all work together towards tackling the climate emergency in Devon.

In 2023 we will also be launching several fares initiatives which will hopefully be attractive to future prospective bus passengers. These include the government backed £2 fare scheme which will run from January to March, as well as subsidised town fares, and a subsidised Devon Day Ticket. Further details on these will be published in due course.

(d) Several of our larger operators have plans to replace their fleet with more environmentally vehicles over the next decade. However, this does require significant investment. DCC have submitted two ZEBRA (Zero Emissions Bus Regional Area) Fund applications, and also applied for funding for electric buses in our initial BSIP bid, however unfortunately these applications were unsuccessful. We remain committed to improving vehicle standards and



reducing air pollution and will work with our operators to identify future investment opportunities.

**9. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON**  
**Re: Energy Crisis**

In the wake of the wider recognition of the climate crisis at COP 27 and the recent publication of the Devon Carbon Plan, and the current energy crisis that is causing huge financial stress, adding to the cost of living crisis and likely to get worse, will DCC support the opportunity to increase the renewable energy capture in Devon by active lobbying for the necessary National Grid link, (which we are told is currently awaiting Hinkley C power station to come of stream), to be installed as soon as possible, i.e. much earlier as a matter of urgency?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS**

Investment in the region's electricity network is essential to enable us to connect new sources of low-carbon energy, including renewables, and to deliver electricity safely, efficiently and reliably, thereby supporting net-zero carbon targets. The Hinkley Point Connection Project is of particular significance, providing a 57km long new high-voltage electricity connection between Bridgwater and Seabank near Avonmouth, with this linked to the development of the Hinkley Point C by EDF. However, there are many other grid constraints in the South West and regulatory issues that result in high connection costs for new projects that often make the investment unviable. The significance of this issue is fully recognised by the County Council, which is already engaging with others – particularly the Heart of the South West LEP, the South West Net-Zero Hub, organisations such as Regen and through direct liaison with National Grid – to highlight the need for urgent action. Ofgem has listened to the lobbying for regulatory reform – from April 2023 more of the costs of new connections will be shared in a fair and proportionate way amongst all network users, making the costs of connecting new generation and consumption projects (like heat pumps and electric vehicle chargers) more affordable. At the same time, the County Council is working with community energy companies and others to explore locally based solutions which might facilitate renewable energy deployment whilst minimising reliance on enhanced grid capacity. These remain key areas for further attention in taking forward the aspirations of the Devon Carbon Plan.

**10. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON**  
**Re: Waste Management**

In moving forward with the Devon Carbon Plan and recognising that waste management has a high carbon footprint, can support be reinstated for Devon Community Composting Network to enable them to provide direct support with, promotion, information and advice for new locally based community composting initiatives coming forward?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD**

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'Recycling Credits' are either statutory payments made to district councils by the County Council or can be made as discretionary payments to registered groups or individuals recycling or composting household waste. The County Council currently pays discretionary credits to approximately 10 community composting groups. The groups register with their district council, who administer their claims. All groups must operate in accordance with the scheme guidance see [The Recycling Credit Scheme - guidance for third party groups in Devon - Waste and Recycling](#) to ensure that claims meet data quality requirements. Payments are made for the "green waste equivalent" which is either the weight of the garden waste entering the site or a calculation based on the compost resulting. On receipt, all claims are checked and approved by the Waste Collection Authorities for payment with an annual audit carried out by DCC to ensure that payments are valid.

The Devon Community Composting Network Co-ordinator was funded by the Devon Authorities Strategic Waste Committee who decided to withdraw support a number of years ago due to financial constraints as well as a desire to focus their budget on more strategic priorities. Given the severe financial pressure that all Local Authorities are currently facing, it is extremely unlikely that the Committee would be able to consider funding a new Co-ordinator. However, community composting groups continue to be supported by their Local Authorities as well as networking with each other.