

## CABINET

8 January 2025

### Present:-

Councillors J McInnes (Chair), A Davis (Vice-Chair), R Croad, R Gilbert, S Hughes, A Leadbetter, L Samuel, A Saywell, P Twiss and P Bullivant

### Apologies:-

None

### Members attending in accordance with Standing Orders 8 and 25

Councillors T Adams, J Brazil, A Davies, P Sanders, A Saywell, D Thomas

Councillor C Leaver (remote attendance)

#### \* **665** **Declarations of Interest**

The Chair reminded Members they should declare any interests they may have in any item to be considered, prior to any discussion taking place on that item. The details of District and or Town and Parish Twin Hatters was on the attached list - [County councillors who are also district, borough, city, parish or town councillors](#).

Councillor Bullivant indicated he would declare an interest on item 22 of the agenda.

#### \* **666** **Minutes**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2024 be signed as a correct record.

#### \* **667** **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

#### \* **668** **Announcements**

There was no announcement by the Chair at this meeting.

#### \* **669** **Petitions**

There was no petition received from a Member of the Public or the Council.

\* **670**      **Question(s) from Members of the Council**

There was no question from a Member of the Council.

\* **671**      **Question(s) from Members of the Public**

There was no question from a Member of the public.

\* **672**      **Target Budget and Service Targets for 2025/2026**

(Councillors Brazil, Leaver and Whitton attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(2) and spoke to this item).

The Cabinet considered the Report of the Director of Finance and Public Value (DFP/25/02), which presented the budget targets for 2025/2026, circulated prior to the meeting in accordance with regulation 7(4) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Cabinet noted that the budget process continued to build on the Financial Sustainability Programme undertaken towards the preparation of the 2023/24 budget and the Working Well Together for a Sustainable and Stronger Council objectives and action areas as agreed by Cabinet in September 2023. The approach aimed to secure Best Value and ensure ongoing financial sustainability.

The proposed service budget targets for 2025/26 totalled £784.1 million, a net increase of £44 million or 5.9% compared to the 2024/25 adjusted base budget.

The preparation of the Budget for 2025/26 recognised that inflationary pressures continued to be felt across the economy, local government and partners. Social care was particularly impacted by increases to the national living wage and the increases to National Insurance. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) was due to provide additional funding towards national insurance costs but details are yet to be confirmed. Within the Target Budgets for services it was proposed to allow for £14.2 million for inflationary pressures. The Target Budgets for services reflected an estimated inflationary pressure of £17.7 million due to National Living Wage impacts.

The proposed service revenue budget targets for the 2025/26 financial year were as follows:

**Table 1 – Service Target Budgets 2025/26**

	<b>2024/25 Adjusted Base Budget £000</b>	<b>Inflation and National Living Wage £000</b>	<b>Other Growth and Pressures £000</b>	<b>Savings, Alternative Funding and Additional Income £000</b>	<b>2025/26 Target Budget £000</b>	<b>Net Change 2024/25 to 2025/26 £000 %</b>	
Integrated Adult Social Care	354,322	19,120	18,190	(8,185)	383,447	29,125	8.2%
Children and Young People's Futures	224,970	7,834	11,054	(6,530)	237,328	12,358	5.5%
Public Health & Communities	13,931	225	365	(1,450)	13,071	(860)	-6.2%
Performance & Partnerships	7,431	121	75	(447)	7,180	(251)	-3.4%
Corporate Services	54,709	1,251	2,822	(3,319)	55,463	754	1.4%
Climate Change, Environment & Transport	84,753	3,346	1,312	(1,808)	87,603	2,850	3.4%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>740,116</b>	<b>31,897</b>	<b>33,818</b>	<b>(21,739)</b>	<b>784,092</b>	<b>43,976</b>	<b>5.9%</b>

The Report detailed the impacts of the new Government's first Autumn Statement on 30 October 2024 and the Local Government Finance Policy Statement on 28 November 2024. Of particular importance to the Council's financial planning, was the Government's plans to repurpose existing funding, for the extra costs of delivering services in rural areas, to support a change in funding distribution based on deprivation as a proxy for need. This resulted in the discontinuation of the Rural Services Delivery Grant (RSDG) funding of £110 million, of which the Council currently received £10.124 million. This repurposing also affected funding of other public services in Devon, with £3.255 million lost across 7 district councils in Devon (not Exeter City) and £575,000 from Devon and Somerset Fire Authority in 2024/25.

Whilst there was a new Recovery Grant, the Council had been advised not to expect any of this additional funding to be allocated to Devon, and this had since been confirmed through the Provisional Settlement.

Details of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2025/26 were published on 18 December 2024, which provided a one year settlement only. The Final Settlement would follow in late January/early February.

For Devon, the core spending power was set to increase by 4.66% and the Government assumes the Authority would implement the full allowed increase in Council Tax up to the referendum threshold of 5%.

The tables in section 5 provided a breakdown of the funding included in Core Spending Power calculations and other grant income included in the settlement such as New Homes Bonus Grant, Social Care Grant, Children's Social Care Prevention Grant and Adult Social Care Market Sustainability & Improvement Fund

As summarised in the tables in the Report, the Government's calculations for the Provisional Settlement assumed an increase in Core Spending Power from £794 million in 2024/25 to £831 million in 2025/26 – an increase of 4.66% assuming the full increase in Council Tax was agreed locally. The Core Spending Power increase at 4.66% meant that Devon had the lowest increase out of all 21 county councils in England.

The matter having been debated and the options and alternatives and other relevant factors (e.g. financial, sustainability and carbon impact, risk management, equality and legal considerations and alignment with the Council's Strategic Plan) set out in the Director's Report having been considered:

it was **MOVED** by Councillor Twiss, **SECONDED** by Councillor McInnes, and

**RESOLVED**

(a) that the revenue budget targets as set out in Table 1 to be incorporated in the Draft Budget for 2025/26 be approved;

(b) that the capital programme be determined by Cabinet on 14th February 2025; and

(c) that the information relating to the Local Government's Finance Settlement for 2025/26 be noted.

\* **673**      **Budget Monitoring - Month 8**

(Councillors Brazil, Leaver and Whitton attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(2) and spoke to this item).

The Cabinet considered the Report of the Director of Finance and Public Value (DFP/25/1), which presented the Budget Monitoring Position at Month 8, circulated prior to the meeting in accordance with regulation 7(4) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

At Month 8 it was estimated that budgets would overspend by just under £3.9 million which was an improvement of £141,000 on the month 6 position. However, it was important to note that this excluded the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit (outlined in full at 3.22 of the Report). Financial risks within Integrated Adult Social Care and Children and Young People's Futures were still being experienced, but work continued to ensure the whole organisation was focused on achieving a break-even position by the end of the year.

Considerable work had been undertaken since spring 2024 to accelerate and deliver upon a range of Safety Valve and SEND service critical objectives and improvements. This included the launch of the Authority's updated SEND Strategy, the rollout of early help pilot activity in North Devon, a range of support work around systems and statutory process improvements to assist and improve the handling of plan development, and agreement and cross organisational working around autism and other health related priorities. Progress continued around addressing the backlog of EHCP plans.

The DSG was forecasting an overspend of £51.6 million at month 8, an increase of £5.8 million from month 6. The table at 3.1 of the Report summarised the Month 8 forecast position by directorate, excluding the Dedicated Schools Grant forecast.

Integrated Adult Social Care services were forecast to overspend by £3.6 million, an increase of £2.5 million from month 6. Children and Young People's Futures services were forecasting an overspend of £7.5 million, an increase of £212,000 from month 6 (not including the projected deficit on Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funded Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)).

At Month 8, the Climate Change, Environment and Transport directorate was forecasting an underspend of £2.2 million, an increase of £160,000 from month 6. Public Health and Communities were forecasting an underspend of £2.1 million relating to vacancy management and delayed heritage projects. Performance and Partnerships were forecasting a small underspend of £48,000, and Corporate Services is forecasting an overspend of £1.8 million, a reduction of £100,000 from month 6.

The approved capital programme budget for the Council is £234.7 million in 2024/25. The year-end forecast was £190.3 million, or 81% of the programme, of which £159.9 million was externally funded. The variance to budget of £44.4 million included a current forecast of slippage of £38.6 million into subsequent years, mainly due to Major Schemes within the Climate Change, Environment and Transport Directorate.

The Capital Receipts position, which was an important element of the Council's capital financing strategy, was outlined at paragraph 3.38.

Corporate debt stood at £7.01 million and earmarked reserves (excluding schools and non-schools carry forwards) stood at just under £101 million. During 2024/25 earmarked reserves were expected to decrease by just over £26 million to just over £75 million.

The matter having been debated and the options and alternatives and other relevant factors (e.g. financial, sustainability and carbon impact, risk management, equality and legal considerations and alignment with the Council's Strategic Plan) set out in the Director's Report having been considered:

it was **MOVED** by Councillor Twiss, **SECONDED** by Councillor McInnes, and

### **RESOLVED**

(a) that the Month 8 budget monitoring forecast position and the Safety Valve Intervention programme update be noted;

(b) that the Budget movements to date as set out in Appendix 1 and the forecast reserves position also be noted; and

And it was further agreed to add:

(c) that Council's seeks further engagement with government on SEND provision

\* **674**     **A361 Barnstaple to Ilfracombe Safer Roads Fund Phase 1 Scheme Approval**

(Councillors Leaver and Whitton attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(2) and spoke to this item).

The Cabinet considered the Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport (CET/25/1), which sought approval for the A361 Barnstaple to Ilfracombe Safer Roads Fund Phase 1 scheme, circulated prior to the meeting in accordance with regulation 7(4) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Report sought to introduce the latest advancements in camera technology to encourage safer driver behaviour and support a reduction in the number of people being killed or seriously injured on the A361 between Ilfracombe and Barnstaple. The Department for Transport had identified the section as a 'high risk' route due to its poor safety record and had committed £5.04 million funding towards road safety improvements (Safer Roads Funding).

This Report recommended a first phase of measures, which included artificial intelligence (AI) cameras to detect seatbelts and distractions, and speed

enforcement cameras which would support safer speeds. There was an opportunity to bring the installation of this first phase of measures forward during 2025/26. A phase 2 report seeking approval for junction upgrades and improved crossings on the A361 to support safer connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists, including access to bus stops would be presented at a future Cabinet meeting.

Appendix 1 identified the location of three new spot speed cameras, which were bidirectional cameras that could detect speeding traffic in both directions of travel. Two were being introduced to help reduce speeds within the local communities at Knowle and Ilfracombe and the other to help manage speeds on the 50mph A361 dual carriageway and its approaches into lower speed limits at Ashford and Barnstaple.

Appendix 1 also illustrated the location of the two new average speed camera systems being proposed between Ashford and Chivenor and between Knowle and Mullacott Cross.

Section 5 of the Report gave details on the collision analysis and financial impact thereof as well as representations from Braunton Parish Council and the Knowle Community Group.

The table in section 6 of the Report summarised how the proposals would impact on the achievement of relevant Strategic Plan actions according to a seven-point scale.

An Impact Assessment had been prepared for Members at the meeting and could be found at - [The Safer Roads Fund – A361 Barnstaple to Ilfracombe Service](#). This highlighted that the project would positively impact on the health and safety of the local population and local road users and as a primary County A-Road, would benefit road users and visitors from out of the County. The A361 provided an important transport link for communities and individuals of different socio and economic groups. By providing a safer and more reliable corridor, this would have a positive impact on providing access to employment, services and help promote social inclusion and connectivity.

The Council had powers under the Highways Act 1980 to acquire land necessary for the improvement of highways. Land could be acquired through negotiation or compulsory purchase and the Council would attempt to secure the land required through negotiation with affected landowners, however in the event that this negotiation was unsuccessful then the compulsory purchase order process may be utilised.

In summary, the A361 had been identified as a high harm route for collisions with evidence indicating that speeds and driver distractions were significant contributory factors. The proposals to introduce a combination of speed enforcement measures to address driver errors was expected to contribute to a reduction in the number of people being killed or seriously injured on this road.

The matter having been debated and the options and alternatives and other relevant factors (e.g. financial, sustainability and carbon impact, risk management, equality and legal considerations and alignment with the Council's Strategic Plan) set out in the Director's Report having been considered:

it was **MOVED** by Councillor Hughes, **SECONDED** by Councillor Davis, and

**RESOLVED**

(a) that the artificial intelligence and speed enforcement cameras scheme on the A361 corridor between Ilfracombe and Barnstaple, as shown in Appendices 1 and 2, be approved for delivery, at an estimated cost of £1 million;

(b) that approval is given to commence the acquisition of land through negotiation and/or a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) for any land required for the scheme; and

(c) that the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highway Management and the local Member, to make minor amendments to the scheme details as necessary.

\* **675**      **Civic Agreement Between DCC and DALC**

(Councillors Brazil, Leaver and Whitton attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(2) and spoke to this item).

The Cabinet considered the Report of the Director of Public Health and Communities (COM/25/1), which sought approval of the Civic Agreement between the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) and Devon County Council (DCC), circulated prior to the meeting in accordance with regulation 7(4) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Report outlined the current multi-tiered elected local government structures, with County, District and Town and Parish (TAPs) Councils in place. Positive, open and informed relationships and timely collaboration were key to daily activity as well as achieving joint strategic outcomes. In time of both crisis and celebration, local government bodies and their communities had worked closely together to support and connect and to facilitate and develop community resilience.

Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) supported vibrant local governance in the county and aimed to strengthen the capacity, capability,



and impact of local councils, whilst promoting the principles of democracy, transparency, inclusivity, and continuous improvement.

This proposed agreement was in line with the Government's emerging Civil Society Covenant, which was subject to consultation in December 2024. This sought to better align Government departments with the community, voluntary sector, faith, and social enterprise sectors.

The Council and the DALC wished to reaffirm and galvanise further their historical but often ad-hoc working relationship through a shared Civic Agreement.

The agreement formalises previously ad-hoc collaborative activity, introducing a framework to inform, plan, facilitate, and implement joint strategic activities to achieve jointly agreed outcomes.

It further set out an ongoing commitment to work in partnership to better understand and collectively respond to key challenges and opportunities for Devon in the years ahead.

The agreement set out how shared strategic priorities, principles and ways of working would be developed and would be underpinned by an annual and mutually agreed plan of activity around specific areas of focus and priority, which would include key priorities for the Council.

The proposal aligned with the vision and priorities in the Council's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 and the Corporate Plan (2024-25) and had the potential to enable delivery of aspects of the Council's principles around good governance, decision making and partnership.

The Agreement would have no specific financial implication on the organisation and was a non-legally binding Memorandum of Understanding.

An Impact Assessment had been prepared for Members at the meeting, attached and was available at [Proposed Civic Agreement between Devon Association of Local Councils and Devon County Council](#). This highlighted that the signing of the agreement could lead to significant positive impacts for all citizens through better sharing of information and insight and joint working to tackle specific issues, particularly those impacting people from groups with protected characteristics.

In summary, the proposal would help to deliver the Council's Strategic and Corporate Plan priorities in developing its work with a key partner in Devon; would provide value for money in developing innovative solutions and learning to increase efficiency, effectiveness of services and to mitigate risks; and develop capacity, capability, and connections between the Council and DALC town and parish councils in Devon.

The matter having been debated and the options and alternatives and other relevant factors (e.g. financial, sustainability and carbon impact, risk management, equality and legal considerations and alignment with the Council's Strategic Plan) set out in the Director's Report having been considered:

it was **MOVED** by Councillor Croad, **SECONDED** by Councillor McInnes, and

**RESOLVED** that the proposed Civic Agreement between the Council and Devon Association of Local Councils be approved.

\* **676** **Partnerships Protocol with NHS Devon- Placements for Children and Young People**

(Councillors Leaver and Whitton attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(2) and spoke to this item).

The Cabinet considered the Report of the Director of Public Health and Communities (PH/25/1) on developing Joint Protocols with NHS Devon for individual commissioning arrangements for Children and Young People, circulated prior to the meeting in accordance with regulation 7(4) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Report outlined the general recognition and agreement between NHS Devon and the Council that there was not in place jointly agreed protocols for agreeing packages of care and organisational routes to agree funding responsibilities for children and young people (up to 18 years). This was not the case for adults where joint agreements were in place.

This absence of agreed, individual commissioning arrangements meant that there was a lack of timely, transparent and consistent decision making, which resulted in some needs of children and young people not being met.

Whilst there were some areas of good practice between NHS Devon and the Council, this was often informal, therefore there was a need to formalise these working practices and agree and formulate information sharing protocols between organisations and escalation procedures.

There were numerous cohorts of children where needs could not be met through commissioned services and required collaboration between the NHS and local authorities to agree additional support needs.

The proposal was to develop an agreed suite of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) providing clear and consistent operational guidance to ensure effective, efficient and equitable delivery of care. These would provide a clear decision making framework, clarifying roles and responsibilities amongst stakeholders, where and how funding decisions were made and

ultimately improve outcomes. The expectation was to complete this task within six months. To embed good practice it was crucial that the SOPs were developed collaboratively.

Initial work had been undertaken and it was proposed to establish an Oversight Group with senior representation from both NHS Devon and the Council to produce an overarching joint working framework, including information sharing protocols, training expectations, organisational funding arrangements and escalation processes.

The Cabinet noted that not having such joint protocols in place meant a risk that organisations were paying for health and care which should be funded from other organisations.

The matter having been debated and the options and alternatives and other relevant factors (e.g. financial, sustainability and carbon impact, risk management, equality and legal considerations and alignment with the Council's Strategic Plan) set out in the Director's Report having been considered:

it was **MOVED** by Councillor Leadbetter, **SECONDED** by Councillor McInnes, and

#### **RESOLVED**

(a) that an oversight group be created, tasked with producing an operating framework for NHS Devon and Devon County Council; and

(b) that a number of specific task and finish groups be established, with responsibility for producing joint Standard Operating Procedures.

\* 677

#### **Childcare Sufficiency Assessment - Annual Return**

(Councillors Brazil, Leaver, Whitton attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(2) and spoke to this item).

The Cabinet considered the Report of the Deputy Director & Head of Inclusion and Learning (Interim) (CS/25/01) which presented the annual return on the sufficiency of early years and childcare places, circulated prior to the meeting in accordance with regulation 7(4) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Cabinet noted the statutory duty as set out in Section 6 (1) of the Childcare Act 2006 to secure sufficient, accessible, affordable, high quality early years and childcare places so far as was reasonably practicable and that an annual report was made to elected Members on how the authority was meeting its duty.

The Report provided a summary of the annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, setting out the current key findings (detailed in the appendix), the use and leverage of national funding, steps being taken to retain and recruit a qualified workforce and the next steps proposed to maintain and meet the Council's statutory duty to secure sufficient, accessible, affordable, high quality early years and childcare places so far as was reasonably practicable.

The Report outlined in detail Early years places for under-five-year-olds and Wraparound places for primary school aged children and the proposals moving forward including addressing new entitlements for working parents, Childcare Sufficiency Hot Spots and how the service was pro-actively responding to developing more childcare provision in these areas.

Nationally and in Devon, it was a challenge to recruit suitably qualified and experienced early years and childcare staff and a number of activities had been taken to support the recruitment and retention of staff within the sector, outlined in full at section 2.9.

The Service was taking a number of steps to improve and secure sufficient, accessible, affordable, high quality early years and childcare places. The key actions were provided at section 3 of the Report. Work included the draft Early Years Strategy which was underway to monitor and measure progress against actions relating to sufficiency of places, take up of funded entitlements, engaging with parents, quality of provision, recruitment and retention of staff within the sector and performance and management information.

The 2023/24 Childcare Sufficiency Annual Report (provided in the appendix) covered the period July 2023 to August 2024.

The matter having been debated and the options and alternatives and other relevant factors (e.g. financial, sustainability and carbon impact, risk management, equality and legal considerations and alignment with the Council's Strategic Plan) set out in the Deputy Director's Report having been considered:

it was **MOVED** by Councillor Leadbetter, **SECONDED** by Councillor McInnes, and

**RESOLVED** that the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Annual Report be approved for publication to the Council's website.

\* 678 **Children's Scrutiny Committee - Fostering Task Group (Cabinet Response)**

(Councillors Adams, Leaver, Sanders and Whitton attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(2) and spoke to this item).

The Cabinet noted that the Children's Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 11 November 2024 had RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee (a) endorses the report and recommendations and commends the report and recommendations to Cabinet; and (b) requests that Cabinet acts against the recommendations and that an update on the progress is brought back to the Committee in March.

The Task Group Report could be viewed at [Fostering Task Group - Children's Scrutiny Committee](#).

The Cabinet then considered a proposed response to each of the recommendations, after careful review, as outlined in section 4 of the Report.

Recommendations 1, 4, 5c, 5d, 6, 9 and 10 were agreed, recommendations 2, 3, 5b and 7 were partially agreed and recommendations 5a and 8 were not agreed, with the rationale for each explained in the Report.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Leadbetter, **SECONDED** by Councillor McInnes and

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet response to the recommendations of the Children Scrutiny Fostering Task Group Report be approved.

\* 679 **Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee - Cost of Living Spotlight Review (Minute 195 of 28 November 2024)**

The Cabinet noted that the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee had considered the Report of the Director of Public Health and Communities ((COM/24/01) 'Cost of Living Spotlight Review - Further progress Report on the cost of living recommendations and subsequent developments') as Minute 195 of 28 November 2024 articulated.

The Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee had RESOLVED that in further considering the original recommendations (as indicated in the Report) from the Cost of Living Spotlight Report (March 2023), which were progressed and reported on in November 2023 (b) that Cabinet be asked to write to Government regarding the anomalies between the new state pension scheme and the preceding state pension scheme.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor McInnes, **SECONDED** by Councillor Davis, and

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet write to Government outlining the concerns of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee regarding the anomalies between the new state pension scheme and the preceding state pension scheme.

**680**      **Notices of Motion**

The following Notices of Motion submitted to the County Council by Councillors Atkinson and Aves have been referred to the Cabinet in accordance with Standing Order 8(2) for consideration, to refer it to another Committee or make a recommendation back to the Council:

**(a)      Control of Local Bus Services (Cllr Atkinson)**

That Devon County Council as the transport authority together with the new combined authority, gives serious consideration to take advantage of the package of measures announced by the Transport Secretary on 9th September 2024 to empower local leaders to take control of their bus services . The expectation is that these measures will be the first stop on the journey to better buses.

The Council undertakes to report into the feasibility of these proposals for Devon and how these powers may be used to improve bus services.

That the County Council consider bringing strategic partners such as District Councils into the discussion, as the provision of effective bus services is something that affects us all and does not recognise boundaries.

Members considered the Officer's factual briefing note on the matter (LDS/25/1) which referred to how bus services became deregulated under the 1985 Transport Act, the introduction of the Local Bus Services Act 2017 which gave powers for Enhanced Partnerships with local bus operators and other stakeholders, the Councils subsequent Bus Service Improvement Plan and the powers under the 2017 Act to Mayoral Combined Authorities to franchise their local bus services. The briefing note outlined the Buses Bill (2024), published on the 17 December 2024 and the franchising guidance published on the same date. The briefing note also highlighted and reflected on how the Council worked with others to improve local bus services under the current framework, including the Bus Forum, the role of the Highways and Traffic Orders Committee's and how the Enhanced Partnership had significantly improved the working relationship between the Council and our local bus companies with an improvement in the quality of local bus services and improved patronage.

The Cabinet considered the recommendation now before them and the actions now proposed and already undertaken and any other relevant factors (e.g. public health, financial, environmental, risk management and equality and legal considerations and Public Health impact):

It was **MOVED** by Councillor McInnes, **SECONDED** by Councillor Davis, and

**RESOLVED** that it is recommended that the Council;

- (a) Welcomes the increased focus on improving local bus services;
- (b) Builds on the success of the current Devon Enhanced Partnership by closer working with Torbay Council and other strategic partners through the new Combined Authority; and
- (c) Asks Officers to review content of the Buses Bill currently proceeding through Parliament to see what future options are available for the new Combined Authority.

**(b) Children's Social Care Policy Statement (Cllr Aves)**

This Council Notes:

On 18 November the Department for Education published a policy statement '[Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive](#)', its new Children's Social Care policy statement, setting out the government's vision for reform and a legislative agenda to reset the children's social care system, both in terms of how national government collaborates with local government, but also in taking a whole system approach to reform.

The Secretary of State states she wants to break down barriers to opportunity. The document also outlines a commitment to support children to live in family settings where children cannot remain at home, including through kinship or foster care, rather than residential care.

The Devon County Labour Group supports this aim and believes Devon County Council must commit to further strengthen what it does to keep families together and children safe.

Alongside this, the statement sets out ambitions to fix the broken care market, invest in key enablers and ensure the system is working effectively for vulnerable children and families.

A Guardian article on children's homes on 18<sup>th</sup> November pointed out that three years ago the Competition and Markets Authority found Children's homeowners in England, Scotland and Wales were making excessive profits, while carrying too much debt - exposing children and councils to unacceptable risks and exploiting children for profit.

The needs of children rather than market forces should shape where children's homes are placed, and that children are placed in the most appropriate homes.

This Council resolves to:

1. work with the new government to reset and improve the children's social care system in Devon as set out in the new document ['Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive'](#) from The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities .
2. welcome the new powers for Ofsted to investigate multiple homes being run by the same company, acting on the recommendations made in response to stop abuse from happening in children's homes.
3. improve the residential care opportunities in Devon to keep children in care near families, friends, and their school where appropriate.
4. increase the number of in-house residential care facilities and use not-for-profit providers, and, become involved in the setting up of Regional Care Co-operatives.
5. give a secure undertaking that they will not place children in homes that are unregistered or just for profit.
6. provide or use not-for-profit homes where children and care experienced young people have access to properly trained staff who are able to give them the support, skills, and connections to friends and relatives that will continue to support them throughout their life.

Members considered the Officer's factual briefing note on the matter (LDS/25/1) which provided a summary overview of the Government White Paper, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive. Breaking down barriers to opportunity. The paper set out the summary of proposals alongside a summary of proposed Government actions. Many of these were referenced in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, published on the 17th December 2024.

The Cabinet considered the recommendation now before them and the actions now proposed and already undertaken and any other relevant factors (e.g. public health, financial, environmental, risk management and equality and legal considerations and Public Health impact):

It was **MOVED** by Councillor McInnes, **SECONDED** by Councillor Davis, and

**RESOLVED** that Council be recommended to;

(a) Note that on the 17th December 2024, the Government published the "Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill" which sets out the proposed legislative framework for achieving these changes. A specific focus of the policy statement and the bill is the management of and improvements to the care market for children in care and, as such, requests a Report from the Director of Children and Young People's Futures on the implications of the measures contained within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill;

(b) Note and welcome that over the last 12 months, Children's Services have increased the provision of residential care for children (both respite care for



children with disabilities and mainstream children's home provision) and of supported accommodation for care experienced people;

(c) Welcome the ongoing work with local providers to improve relationships and to provide "Devon Placements for Devon's Children", noting the specific focus on reducing the use of unregistered children's homes;

(d) Welcome the new powers for Ofsted to investigate multiple homes being run by the same company, acting on the recommendations made in response to stop abuse from happening in children's homes;

(e) Continue to improve the residential care opportunities in Devon to keep children in care near families, friends, and their school where appropriate;

(f) Increase the number of in-house residential care facilities and use not-for-profit providers, and, become involved in the setting up of Regional Care Co-operatives;

(g) Continue to reduce the number of children in unregistered children's homes; and

(h) Where possible, provide or use not-for-profit homes where children and care experienced young people have access to properly trained staff who are able to give them the support, skills, and connections to friends and relatives that will continue to support them throughout their life.

\* **681**      **Minutes**

It was **MOVED** by Councillor McInnes, **SECONDED** by Councillor Davis, and

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the following be endorsed and any recommendations to Cabinet therein be approved:

Farms Estate (Interviewing) Committee – 16 December 2024

\* **682**      **Delegated Action/Urgent Matters**

The [Registers of Decisions taken by Members under the urgency provisions or delegated powers](#) were available for inspection, in line with the Council's Constitution and Regulation 13 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012. [Decisions taken by Officers](#) under any express authorisation of the Cabinet or other Committee or under any general authorisation within the Council's Scheme of Delegation set out in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution.

\* **683**      **Forward Plan**

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Cabinet reviewed the [Forward Plan](#) and determined those items of business to be defined as key

and framework decisions and included in the Plan from the date of this meeting onwards reflecting the requirements of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

\* **684**      **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

It was **MOVED** by Councillor McInnes, **SECONDED** by Councillor Davis and

**RESOLVED** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act namely, the financial or business affairs of the preferred bidder or tenderers for the provision or supply of council goods or services and also relating to contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with labour relations matters, and in accordance with Section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, by virtue of the fact that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

\* **685**      **Community Equipment Service - Part 2**

*(An item taken under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 during which the press and public were excluded, no representations having been received to such consideration under Regulation 5(5) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012).*

(Councillor Bullivant declared a personal interest in this matter by virtue of being a Trustee of an organisation who have delivered these services, noting there had been no involvement in the tender process, but withdrew from the meeting during its consideration).

The Cabinet considered the Report of the Director of Integrated Adult Social Care (IASC/25/01) on the completion of due diligence on contract award for joint community equipment services, circulated prior to the meeting accordance with regulation 7(4) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

In October 2024, Cabinet had agreed to award a 7-year contract for the provision of a joint Health and Social Care Community Equipment Service, following the completion of a competitive tendering exercise.

The procurement process then entered the final 'standstill' stage whilst officers completed the final due diligence checks. The Report outlined those due diligence checks and asked that Cabinet reconfirm its October decision in that context.

An Impact Assessment had previously been published - [Impact Assessment Community Equipment Service Contract Recommissioning.pdf](#)

The matter having been debated and the options and/or alternatives and other relevant factors (e.g. financial, sustainability, carbon impact, risk management, equality and legal considerations and Public Health impact) set out in the Director's Report and/or referred to above having been considered:

It was **MOVED** by Councillor McInnes, **SECONDED** by Councillor Davis, and

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet acknowledge the completion of due diligence checks relating to the award of a 7-year contract and reaffirms its decision to award the contract.

\* 686 **Children's Home Feasibility Study - Part 2**

*(An item taken under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 during which the press and public were excluded, no representations having been received to such consideration under Regulation 5(5) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012).*

The Cabinet considered the joint Report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures and Director of Performance and Partnerships (CS/25/02), seeking approval for a feasibility study for a children's home, circulated prior to the meeting accordance with regulation 7(4) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Report outlined the work to date with a cross-organisational team being brought together to develop concepts with the DfE. A working group had also been formed to develop the practical and operational overview of the project.

The matter having been debated and the options and/or alternatives and other relevant factors (e.g. financial, sustainability, carbon impact, risk management, equality and legal considerations and Public Health impact) set out in the Director's Report and/or referred to above having been considered:

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Leadbetter, **SECONDED** by Councillor McInnes, and

**RESOLVED**

(a) that the principle outlined in the Report, in relation to a new children's home, be supported;

(b) that a feasibility study be progressed to support Department for Education processes and obtain funds for a completed business case; and

(c) that once the feasibility study is complete, the matter will return to Cabinet for further consideration.

**NOTES:**

1. *Minutes should always be read in association with any Reports for a complete record.*
2. *If the meeting has been webcast, it will be available to view on the [webcasting site](#) for up to 12 months from the date of the meeting*

\* **DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 12.48 pm