

COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET CONSULTATION 2020/21 WITH DEVON'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY, REPRESENTATIVES OF OLDER PEOPLE AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND TRADE UNIONS

1.0 Recommendation: that the contents of the report and the representations of the consultees be noted.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The Leader of the Council, other Members and officers met with the representatives of the Business Community, organisations which champion the cause of older people and the voluntary sector, and Trade Unions. This was to discuss the County Council's budget for 2020/21 in line with statutory requirements and previous good practice.

3.0 Budget Consultation with Parish and Town Councils

3.1 The Leader of the Council attended three local meetings during November and December 2019 as part of the budget consultation process. These were based on existing Town and Parish Cluster meetings or similar in each District or City Council area.

3.2 At each meeting the Leader gave a short presentation of key budgetary issues and factors affecting the County Council and the wider Devon area before inviting open questions.

3.3 The key themes to emerge included: Highway maintenance and attention to minor rural roads; School funding and new school planning; DCC's action on the climate emergency, and Social Care funding for the elderly and tackling issues such as loneliness and isolation.

3.4 Other issues raised included: Recycling collections; The future of healthcare; Parking regulations, and Police funding.

3.5 Issues and suggestions related directly to the budget and efficiency included: Rural transport subsidies, and the budgetary risks associated with an ageing population.

4.0 Budget Presentation

- 4.1 The Deputy County Treasurer gave a presentation on the 2020/21 budget at each of the three consultative meetings.
- 4.2 The presentation first reflected upon the significant changes to the way in which Local Government has been funded over the last 10 years. The reduction in core funding from 2010/2011 to 2019/20 was outlined in terms of the cash reduction year on year and the real term cumulative impacts on the Council.
- 4.3 The presentation also highlighted the current position in terms of the revenue budget for 2019/20 and the reserves and balances in terms of the County fund and the earmarked reserves. The earmarked reserves of Devon County Council were compared with the reserves of other English County Councils.
- 4.4 Looking forward to 2020/2021 and beyond, while much was expected to take place in this year, including the start of a new multi-year settlement, the Fairer Funding Review, 100%/75% Business Rates Retention schemes, and a Business Rates reset, this is now expected to be delayed, due to the recent tumultuous political climate in central government. Furthermore, the basic increase in Council Tax that will trigger a referendum is now 2%.
- 4.5 The presentation underlined that after 9 years of reductions in Government funding, core funding is increased by 1.6% (CPI inflation). Furthermore, there is an additional £14 million of Government funding for Social Care and the Adult Social Care Precept has extended to a further 2% available in 2020/21.
- 4.6 Finally, the presentation outlined the budget targets for 2020/21 and the budget timetable. As part of these budget targets, £50.636m of Investment in Services of which £41 m is for Adults and Children's Services was highlighted.

5.0 Representatives of Older People and the Voluntary Sector: 14 January 2020

- 5.1 Representatives at this meeting included Revd Iain McDonald (Devon Faith and Belief Forum), Sarah Broadbent (Fawcett Society), Julia Paget (Plymouth and Devon Racial Equality Council), David Incoll (CAB), Sheila Curzon (National Pensioners convention), Andrea Scott (Age Concern Barnstable and District), Molly Holmes (Age UK Mid Devon), Shirley Fewings MBE (Assist Teignbridge), David Rogers (Healthwatch Devon), Leila Manion (Living Options), Julia Bonell (Parent Carer Forum Devon), John Duncan (Retired Members Unison), Victoria Mitchell (Parent Carer Forum Devon), Nrvan Zawal (Hikmat Devon CIC).
- 5.2 Issues and questions raised by the group and discussed with County Council representatives included:
- the level of core funding for communities and groups having reduced in recent times and questions on the effectiveness of Crowd Funding;
 - the increasing level of DCC employees;
 - the collection of council tax for those on social care;

- the level of diversity within DCC employment;
- the ability to deliver Extra Care schemes with District Councils and housing associations;
- the level of funding for Children's Services considering recent Ofsted and CQC inspections;
- the importance of sustained partnerships between the voluntary sector and the County Council in meeting the needs of people in Devon and reassurance that the Council will continue to support voluntary organisations; and
- the importance of sustained support of carers and the need for greater investment.

6.0 Representatives of Trade Unions: 14 January 2020

6.1 Representatives at this meeting included Andy Bowman (UNISON), Paul Gosling (NAHT Devon), Darienne Flemington (UNISON), Tim Hodge (Devon NUT), Julia Neal (NEU) and Nigel Williams (Devon NASUWT).

6.2 Issues and questions raised by the group and discussed with County Council representatives included:

- the potential impact of Brexit on the Council;
- the funding of library services in Devon;
- the potential of the Business Rates pilot scheme of 2019/20 being repeated; and
- the provisions for staff pay rises.

7.0 Representatives of the Business Community: 15 January 2020

7.1 Businesses and organisations represented at this meeting included John Laramy (Exeter College), Derek Phillips (Exeter Chamber of Commerce), Helen Hart (Devon & Plymouth Chamber Of Commerce), Andrew Butler (NFU) and Sue Goodfellow (Devon Wildlife Trust).

7.2 Issues and questions raised by the group and discussed with County Council representatives included:

- a concern that Council finances could be affected by overspending in some areas;
- the need for greater communication between DCC and the business community;
- the Council's position on raising business rates;
- the impact of Climate Change on the Council;

- the problems in creating a greater infrastructure for electric cars; and
- the level of spending on infrastructure.

8.0 Conclusion

The consultations carried out provided a positive opportunity for the people of Devon to specify their priorities in future service delivery, particularly in times of austerity where difficult choices have had to be made. The data collected, and feedback received provides a valuable snapshot of current opinion on where resources should and should not be allocated in future.

Jan Shadbolt, County Solicitor

ELECTORAL DIVISIONS: ALL

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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<u>Background Paper</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>File Reference</u>
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Nil