

## **Service Delivery for Climate Change, Environment and Transport: In-Year Briefing**

Briefing Paper by the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

### **1. Summary**

This report provides an in-year briefing on service delivery within Climate Change, Environment and Transport.

### **2. Current Position Statements**

#### **2.1 Planning Team**

Government measures performance of local planning authorities on the speed and quality of decision making on planning applications, with poorly performing authorities potentially being put under special measures. The planning team have continued to perform very well, determining 96% of county matter planning applications within statutory time limits over the last two years.

With the use of Homes Infrastructure Funding, progress has been made on progressing the necessary schemes needed to bring the housing developments forward on the SW of Exeter. Work is shortly due to start on the pedestrian/cycle bridge which will serve the new school (opening September 2023) and good progress is being made on the plans for the new community building and electricity bulk supply point.

Several District Councils are progressing their local plans, and the planning team continue to coordinate and provide the Council's corporate response to consultations on these plans.

#### **2.2 Highways and Traffic Management**

This briefing only covers those areas not previously reported via the Highways Dashboard.

The Highways and Traffic Management team has acknowledged its role in addressing the climate crisis and the need to understand the volumes of carbon produced through construction and maintenance operations. Through a partnership with Exeter University and the Future Highways Research Group the service is developing standards for calculating scope 3 greenhouse gases associated with the highway sector that will become the approach that is adopted nationally via ADEPT (Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport). The importance of the project has been recognised and supported by the Department for Transport.

Additionally, a tool has been produced that will enable the service to understand the carbon intensity of various operations, which will inform our choices to minimise emissions. Other operations are focused on the reduction of carbon, particularly in streetlighting with the continued roll out of LEDs and the management system that allows the lights to be controlled centrally. This has seen a reduction in annual carbon emissions in excess of 75% (approx. 10,000t) since 2016.

The most recent carriageway condition surveys reported a continued reduction in the length of the road network that is considered as 'needing immediate work', particularly in the C Class and unclassified network which makes up the vast majority of Devon's asset. This is a significant result and indicates that the more flexible approach to both managing the network and repairs is having a real benefit.

The improvement in the network condition indicated by the machine surveys is also supported by the continued reduction in the number of recorded potholes. Since the start of the financial year up until the middle of October, the service has recorded 17,371 potholes. By comparison, the same period in 2021 saw 26,191 potholes recorded (50% higher).

The award of £2.1m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the 'Restoring Stover Park' project will enable the delivery of significant improvements to the site including the dredging of the lake, replanting of the conifer plantation with native species and the repair of the Grade II\* listed granite gatehouse. Both of the Council's country parks provide an important community asset that supports the health and wellbeing of the local community and visitors.

The team has reviewed the functionality of the digital tools available for the public to request licences, such as vehicle crossings and permissions to place skips or scaffolds on the public highway. This work has developed into a major project in partnership with the Digital Transformation Team that will improve the customer journey with the aim of enhancing customer service and provide better tools for officers to manage competing demands.

The Network Operations Control Centre has focused on improving their proactive communications with road users. Through regular and reliable information provided via social media, the team has seen the number of Twitter followers increase to over 12,000. They are trialling the use of Facebook to further extend their reach.

The service continues to face the challenge of reduced tolerance in our communities. This issue is acute within the Civil Parking Enforcement team, who are experiencing increased levels of verbal and physical abuse as they go about their role.

### 2.3 Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure delivery over the last 12 months has been impacted by the significant levels of inflation affecting all elements of the construction industry.

Supply of materials has improved during the year, but price increases in the order of 20% have been commonplace. We continue to liaise with our contractors and industry associations to ensure that delivery of projects remains sustainable.

The staffing of the North Devon Link Road scheme continues to take a number of DCC staff from their normal work, and as a consequence more works are being delivered this year through our professional services contract with WSP.

Together with our private sector partners WSP, the design teams have over 400 live projects ranging from small highways projects, active travel schemes and highway maintenance, to larger capital projects including recycling centres and major highway improvements.

The group has taken on a number of apprentices this year and there continues to be a good number of staff who are pursuing academic and professional qualifications.

Other than NDLR there are several major projects currently being delivered.

Marsh Barton Station is progressing well on site, with the main civils work planned to be completed in November 2022 with the entry into service anticipated for early March 2023.

The Shutterton Bridge at Dawlish has received cabinet approval and is progressing well; the scheme will go to tender in November 2022 with a planned works start of May 2023.

Works are currently underway on a new roundabout at Kitterford Cross.

Notably over the last year, the teams have delivered a new roundabout at Modbury Cross (£1.2m), a new link road at Houghton Barton (£6.1m) and continue to undertake preparatory works on the A382 Major Road Network Scheme (£45m) and Crowndale recycling centre (£6.5m).

Approximately 40 schools' estate projects are on site or have been completed during the first half of this financial year and these will deliver in the region of £4.5 million of maintenance improvements to the School Estate.

In addition, we have handed over the major expansion project at Orchard Manor Special School in September 2022 and completed a successful expansion at ACE Tiverton which included acquisition and remodelling of a former charity building. We remain on-site with the new 100 place Special School in Okehampton and expansion of Lampard School in Barnstaple.

## 2.4 Transport Planning and Road Safety

In early summer, five Levelling Up Fund transport bids for funding were submitted in partnership with our District Councils for West Devon Transport

Hub (new rail station and multi-modal interchange on eastern edge of Okehampton); Dinan Way link road including town centre walking and cycling enhancements in Exmouth; Cullompton Town Centre Relief Road, Newton Abbot to Torquay cycle scheme, and Lee Mill A38 new slip road.

During August this year, Active Travel England invited all Local Authorities to carry out a self-assessment of their own performance on active travel. Our submission was accepted as Level 2 showing strong local leadership and support, with strong plans and emerging network (only 5 authorities nationally were assessed as Level 3). The result was a provisional allocation of a £582,000 Capability and Ambition Fund. We have submitted more detailed proposals to fund forward design of future Active Travel Fund schemes, completion of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs), and building capability through training on the latest Government cycling design guidance. We also propose funding continued behaviour change activities, including adult cycle training and engagement activities with employers and communities.

In addition, Active Travel England are expecting bids for a multi-year active travel funding settlement and have indicated a deadline of 23 December for submission.

This autumn, Devon County Council submitted a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for the Tavistock to Plymouth railway reopening. By the end of November, we also expect to complete a SOBC for new passing loops on the West of England mainline, which aims to support improved reliability and increased frequency of rail services between Exeter and East Devon towns through to Axminster.

There is an expectation from Government for Local Authorities to produce a new Local Transport Plan by Spring 2024; however guidance has been delayed until the new year. Early indications are that Local Transport Plans will be expected to focus on decarbonisation, levelling up and improved user experience, with proposals needing to quantify carbon emission reductions. As this has significant resource implications, Government allocated approximately £170,000 capacity funding to support this work. This has enabled a joint team to be created involving transport planners from DCC and our framework partners, WSP. It has also funded the continued development of supporting strategies and technical work, including the Devon Electric Vehicle Strategy which has gone to public consultation this month.

LCWIPs have been completed for Heart of Teignbridge (covering Newton Abbot, Kingsteignton and Kingskerswell) and Barnstaple with Bideford and Northam, and the draft Exeter LCWIP will be consulted upon later this year. Scoping has begun for the Countywide Strategic Trail Network LCWIP.

Work also continues providing technical and policy support to Exeter, Teignbridge, Mid Devon and East Devon District Councils on their emerging Local Plans. This advice will help identify transport infrastructure requirements to facilitate sustainable economic development across those areas.

At a Sub Regional level, officers continue to work with Cornwall, Plymouth, Torbay and Somerset authorities to develop Peninsula-wide transport strategies to support improved connectivity and economic growth and decarbonisation outcomes. This year it has completed freight, rural mobility and carbon strategies, which will provide a strong basis for future investment in the sub region.

Collision statistics for Devon have continued to show a positive downward trend in the number of people who are being injured on our roads. During the height of the COVID pandemic in 2021/22, significant reductions in traffic also resulted in fewer road injuries being recorded locally and nationally. The latest injury collision numbers show that Devon is still performing well in terms of its pre-Covid average; however, traffic volumes appear to be recovering post pandemic and so we will continue to monitor how this impacts on collisions.

Earlier this year we saw the completion of the £1.9million A3123 Safer Roads scheme in North Devon (near Ilfracombe / Combe Martin) and we are in the final stages of completing the £2.2million A3121 Safer Roads scheme in South Devon (between A38 Wrangaton Cross and Ermington), expected before the end of the financial year. As part of the Government's Growth Plan, a further Safer Roads Fund scheme has been identified for the A361 between Ilfracombe and Barnstaple.

## 2.5 Waste Management

Devon experienced overall waste growth of 1.2% in 2021/22, a welcome reduction from the previous year of 3% in 2020/21. Current figures indicate a further lowering of growth for 2022/23. The recycling rate is stable at 55.1% and Devon remains one of the top performers in the country. Further residual waste has been diverted away from landfill with residual waste from the Household Waste Recycling Centres in Exeter and East Devon now being sent for energy recovery.

The district councils and Torbay Council, with whom the County Council works closely, have continued to have trouble recruiting and retaining drivers and other operators. However, East Devon District Council achieved a recycling rate of 61%. Mid Devon have started a 3 weekly residual waste collection service and South Hams have taken their service back in house and will seek to achieve the "aligned" service next year.

## Progress toward the 'Aligned Option'

Version: October 2022

				
	Food Waste (Weekly)	Garden Waste (£/fortnightly)	Dry Recycling (Weekly)	Residue (fortnightly)
<b>East Devon</b> ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (3)
Exeter	(X)	✓	(f)	✓
Mid Devon	✓	✓	(f)	✓ (3)
<b>North Devon</b> ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>South Hams</b> ✓	✓ (50%)	✓ (2023)	✓	✓
<b>Teignbridge</b> ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Torridge</b> ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>West Devon</b> ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Torbay</b> ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

YELLOW = aligned option / £ = charged service / m = mixed collection / f = fortnightly / 3 = 3wky / X = N/A / O = Other

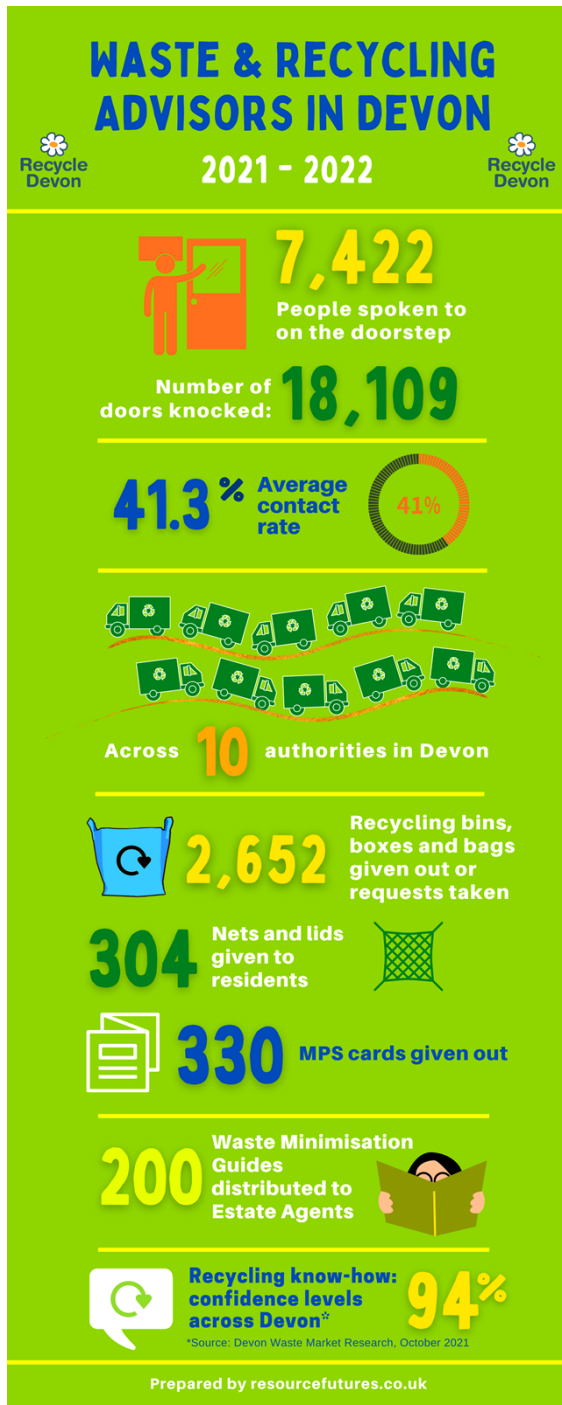
### Devon Authorities Strategic Waste Committee

The County Council continues to lead the behavioural change work across Devon under the banner of RecycleDevon. Campaigns have included Get Composting, Metal Matters, and food and plastic waste reduction and recycling. This focus is on materials that have a high carbon impact.

The Clean Devon Partnership brings together 25 organisations across Devon, Torbay and Plymouth and is aimed at collaboratively reducing litter and fly tipping. The partnership has attended shows and implemented a successful campaign to reduce fly tipping, which included the Environment Agency, the Police, the NFU, and CLA and local landowners. Parish Councils have been surveyed to gain a better understanding of their views on litter and fly tipping, and a campaign is being planned for Spring focussed on coastal issues such as abandoned body boards and disposable BBQs.

Funded by the Devon Authorities Strategic Waste Committee, a compositional study of 1800 residual bins across the county has been procured. This will enable a better understanding of how to focus communications and operations going forward. The results are due in December.

During the first year of the National Lottery-funded Food Rescue project, two [Community Fridges](#) have been set up in Exeter and Okehampton. At Okehampton, more than a tonne of food waste has been redistributed to date, equating to 2000 meals and 3 tonnes of carbon saved, with £3000 of value going back into the community. This Autumn the project will be organising gleaning of apples and other farm produce.



The Waste and Recycling Advisors contract is jointly funded by Devon, Torbay and the District Councils, and continues to provide much needed one-to-one engagement with residents particularly at a time when authorities are introducing new or changed services. Additionally, avoidance of food waste and single use plastics plus the reduction of carbon, remains topical. The Waste & Recycling Advisors are addressing concerns from residents and answering their queries, as well as providing additional bins, boxes, caddies and sacks where requested.

## 2.6 Highways Development Management

The development market remains very busy in the wake of the Covid pandemic. Residential development in particular continues apace across the county.

At Cranbrook, house building continues whilst a number of large allocated sites have planning applications either live or imminent as part of the continued expansion of the new town. Work has commenced on a new supermarket in the town centre, which will help to promote a higher degree of

self-containment. Sherford is also continuing, aided by the link road to the A38 constructed by the County Council.

The Eastern Urban Extension of Tiverton development is underway, but unfortunately financing issues have meant a postponement by Mid Devon District Council of the second phase of a new junction on to the A361 North Devon link Road.

Allocated residential development sites are continuing to come forward in Bideford and Barnstaple.

Across the county, officers are working closely with colleagues at the various Local Planning Authorities as the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessments consider new development sites for future Local Plan allocations.

## 2.7 Transport Coordination Service (TCS)

The Public and Community Transport team manage supports a network of 189 local bus services and various community transport schemes that are not provided by the commercial market. There have been a number of pressures over the last 12 months in relation to the slow recovery of passenger numbers following the pandemic, the highly publicised driver shortages with Stagecoach and the high inflation costs linked with providing transport. The future brings financial challenges, with continued uncertainty in the commercial market and with the Recovery funding from the Department for Transport also set to end in March 2023.

The TCS has issued 135,500 National Bus Passes which, in line with national guidance, are renewed every 5 years. As well as assessing eligibility for the Bus Pass, the TCS reimburse bus companies for journeys made within our administrative area. Government guidance through the pandemic was to reimburse the bus companies as pre-pandemic levels, but this is gradually returning to actual levels of travel which currently stand at around 80%.

The TCS manage transport for just over 15,000 passengers per day, of which 2,200 have a Special Educational Need (SEND). The pressure on the SEND transport budget is well documented and has been through the Children's Services Scrutiny. It is a key part of the County Council's Financial Sustainability Programme, with focus on high cost transport arrangements, attendance and making transport planning an integrated part of the overall decision making process.

Alongside Education transport, the TCS also manage transport for Children and Adults with an identified transport need. There is also a team of four officers managing an Independent Travel Training programme.

Since May 2016, the TCS manages the Patient Transport Advice Service (PTAS) on behalf of the NHS. This sits alongside DCC's transport functions and is recognised nationally through the TCS being part of a national



Pathfinder project working with two other areas and NHS England. The work of the project will help form national guidance and future management of patient transport.

Around 360 County Council fleet vehicles are managed, ranging from accessible minibuses to transport children with SEND to school, as well as Highways vans. Electric vans have started to enter the fleet, and for passenger carrying vehicles, work is currently taking place looking at the cost effectiveness of the in house fleet when compared with commissioning from external providers.

An important part of the TCS function is managing the safety and compliance of all services, by commissioning a large volume of transport needs with a multitude of contractors. This includes making sure drivers and escorts have the correct DBS checks, appropriate training is in place, vehicles are correctly licenced, and following up any complaints or concerns. All transport is procured through a Dynamic Purchasing System where 386 suppliers are approved from the individual taxi company up to larger bus and coach companies.

Through the Association of Transport Coordination Officers (ATCO), Officers from the TCS have regular dialogue with other councils across the region as well as meeting with the Departments for Transport, Education and Health & Social Care on transport-related issues helping set national policy and guidance.

## 2.8 Environment Group

We continue to provide core environmental services relating to the conservation of Devon's natural and historic environment, the main focus of which is providing specialist advice in support of the County Council's statutory planning functions, its infrastructure development and, increasingly, inputting to District Council planning issues on a full cost recovery basis. An important new focus this year has been the implementation of new statutory functions stemming from the Environment Act 2021, particularly the introduction of procedures to deliver 'Biodiversity Net Gain' for future development and the planned establishment of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Devon.

Much of our work continues to be delivered through a range of environmental partnerships, either coordinated through or supported by this authority. A particular highlight has been the publication of the final version of the Devon Carbon Plan through the Devon Climate Emergency partnership, which sets out the required action to achieve net zero carbon emissions across the county. Good progress has also been made in the implementation of our own DCC Carbon Reduction Plan through investment in a range of capital projects, including street lighting, the refurbishment of County Council buildings, the purchase of electric vehicles for our fleet, and the purchase of land for woodland planting for carbon offsetting purposes.

In our role as Lead Local Flood Authority, there has been increasing demand for our services, particularly through our statutory consultee role in advising on sustainable drainage issues for all major development and in processing consents for works affecting watercourses. Notably this year, we extended our role in supporting Somerset County Council, which faced severe staffing difficulties within its Flood Team. Our own team continues to progress the delivery of flood protection works, including an increasing number of natural flood management interventions and the installation of individual property flood resilience, as well as larger-scale schemes to protect at risk communities such as Ivybridge, Sidmouth and Stokeinteignhead. A notable success has been securing more than £7m of Defra funding for our 'Devon Resilience Innovation Programme', which is exploring new approaches to flood resilience.

Meg Booth

Director of Climate Change Environment and Transport

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Highway Management: Councillor Stuart Hughes

Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport: Councillor Andrea Davis

Cabinet Member for, Public Health, Communities and Equality: Councillor Roger Croad

**Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers**

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
Nil		

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