

Service Delivery for Planning, Transportation and Environment, Communities, and Economy, Enterprise and Skills: In-Year Briefing

Briefing Paper by the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment, Head of Communities, and Head of Economy, Enterprise and Skills

1. Introduction

This mid-year report for Scrutiny covers the functions of Planning, Transportation and Environment, Communities, and Economy, Enterprise and Skills.

2. Planning, Transportation and Environment - Head of Service: Dave Black

Even though the work environment has continued to be difficult, good progress has been made on projects so far this year. Transport Co-ordination has continued to be the most affected area. The bus network has been massively affected. The current situation is that service levels have returned to near normal, but patronage is still running at about 75% of pre COVID levels. This is largely due to the restrictions in place due to social distancing and the reduced need to travel, for example to access work & shopping. The effect of this on operating costs is that government grant is still available to make up for the shortfall in revenue to keep the services running at current levels until April 2022.

School transport has been running successfully and is back to normal. The number of people using the National Bus Pass on buses has reduced significantly. Community Transport has weathered the storm and is back operating more or less as before COVID, which is a real positive and demonstrates the importance of the support it receives.

The government initiative “Bus Back Better” is welcome, and we have submitted an ambitious bid. This is the first step in a process and conversation with government on future funding for buses. The process has generated a high level of expectancy which may have to be managed depending on the level of grant received from Government.

Key projects to improve flood risk resilience have, or are in the process of, being delivered at: Sidmouth - Knowle, Ivybridge - Stibbs Lane Improvements and Exeter Northbrook Phase 2. These projects generally include catchment based natural flood management. In addition, there are a number of property flood resilience projects at Stokeinteignhead, Harbertonford, Ugborough and South Pool. Sidmouth is worthy of a special mention as it was an innovative scheme where land was obtained from East Devon District Council to construct flood water storage to avoid water runoff into the town centre. No one imagined that a scheme that obviously requires a significant volume of water to be intercepted and stored before it gets to the town, could in effect be hidden in plain sight. Giving the community an amphitheatre is a real asset that will be a draw for many people over many years.

School admissions for September 2021 resulted in 98% of families receiving one of their four preferences. New primary/nursery schools have been provided using the government's free school programme at Roundswell – Barnstaple and Monkerton – Exeter. Works have also now started on site for the 1,380 place all-through school at South West Exeter. The school is being delivered by the Department for Education through the central government free school programme and will be run by Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust. Work is due to start imminently on the new Special Free School at Okehampton.

Plans continue to secure additional capacity across the special school estate including the enlargement of ACE Tiverton Special School. Lampard School Barnstaple has received planning consent to increase places and Marland School increased its day places at its primary site in Bideford and its secondary school site at Barnstaple.

Work on the planning and delivery of major housing growth areas continues. Homes England funding has enabled work to progress on new junctions to access the developments in South West Exeter. The construction has been delayed for various reasons, which is disappointing and has caused concern for local residents. However, house building is now taking place at three locations and the school and associated pedestrian/cycle bridge construction has commenced or is about to. There have been some delays at Sherford due to voids and labour/material issues, as a result build rates have slowed down. There continues to be considerable progress in Cranbrook with plans coming forward for the Town Centre, but delivery of the DCC Children's Centre, Library and Youth facilities is stalled due to lack of developer contributions.

A number of measures to improve facilities for cyclists and pedestrians have taken place in Exeter where there was the greatest opportunity. The measures are on the Exeter strategic cycle network and have been carefully selected to be those that are away from the main vehicular arterial routes to not impact public transport. Although journeys by car maybe slightly longer, they are still possible. All the measures and recommendations have and will be made at Highways and Traffic Orders Committees (HATOCs). It is anticipated that further modest government funding will enable more permanent works.

The first phase of the A382 improvements between Newton Abbot and Drumbridges opened in May. Construction has started on the A382/A383 link road, which will enable traffic to avoid Highweek and access the emerging development at Houghton Barton. The Department for Transport announced, in May, that funding is available for the final phase of the improvement to the A382 corridor. The next 2 years will be taken up with design, tenders and production of the Full Business Case. Construction is planned to commence in 2024. The two government funded safety schemes in north and south Devon are progressing on site. Work has commenced on improvements to the North Devon Link Road and improvements at the Westleigh junction (Bideford) have been completed.

Now made public, The Devon Climate Emergency project completed the Citizens' Assembly, which tested the public's appetite for addressing the more controversial issues. Its findings will be used to update the Interim Carbon Plan into a final

version. Devon County Council has secured funding from the government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to retrofit five corporate estate buildings to deliver carbon, energy and cost reductions. This will exceed the Carbon Reduction Plan targets for the corporate estate as set out in the Carbon Reduction Plan by 2030. Funding is available for carbon offsetting; this has been used to buy carbon offsets and purchase 30 acres of land in mid Devon in order to plant a forest which will also provide a net gain in biodiversity.

We continue to maintain our core environmental services relating to the conservation of Devon's natural and historic environment. Our success in working with partners and drawing in of external funding massively extends the scale and scope of our influence. Highlights include continuing to work with and support the Local Nature Partnership, North Devon Biosphere and the five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Environment Bill is a significant piece of legislation which addresses the Government's manifesto commitments and the vision set out in its 25 Year Environment Plan. It has implications for the Council as it includes the requirement to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and fulfill a number of new statutory planning functions such as: 10% biodiversity net gain on planning applications (produce a Biodiversity Report every five years), greater protection for endangered species and conservation of protected sites.

3. Communities – Head of Service: Simon Kitchen

The Communities portfolio leads a range of commissioning and collaboration to develop services and support, helping people and organisations in communities to be better connected, resilient and safe.

This includes:

- commissioning of Devon's youth services, support around domestic and sexual violence, and library and heritage services;
- community safety and co-ordination of related work and partnerships; and statutory co-ordination in preventing extremism and radicalisation.
- community development and response across the County and its links to the Council's priorities; and
- work to support a range of communities including the Armed Forces Covenant partnership; the resettlement of Syrian families and recent Afghan refugees, Gypsies and Travellers, and through Active Devon accessing and increasing physical activity across the County.

The team have continued to lead aspects of the Council's pandemic response and recovery particularly in addressing the impacts of poverty on families across Devon. Over the last year work has led on the distribution of over £5 million to children and families in need and organisations that support them, alongside the development of long-term responses, in partnership. The Reconnect, Rebuild and Recovery fund has already invested £300,000 in small grants to community organisations to restart activity safely and to bring people together. The recent Climate Change crowdfunding initiative brought investment in local innovation and much interest and support from the public.

Co-ordination and development of the Safer Devon Partnership, the Devon and Torbay Prevent Partnership and the Youth Crime Prevention Board continues with significant input from the team alongside co-ordination of local commissioning and innovation. In order to deliver new duties within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, a needs assessment and strategy for the delivery of the duty has been agreed and alongside the establishment of an active Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board. New funding has been made available to support this work with a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) bid for funding for future years.

DYS Space have continued its support to young people throughout the pandemic, including through its digital delivery, which is already receiving national recognition for its reach and impact. Face to face and street-based activity continues with numbers recovering to pre-pandemic levels. A legacy of safeguarding and concerns regarding wellbeing of young people have emerged. An additional £600,000 was secured to deliver additional activity during this year, particularly encouraging young people to connect safely over summer and the recent half term. Plans are in place for delivery for the remainder of the year. In addition, this money was utilised to fund, equip and train a range of community groups and organisations supporting young people and this has been vital in ensuring the survival and restart of many local youth groups. £300,000 has been secured from Covid funding for the update of existing outdoor spaces both Council and community owned.

Libraries Unlimited stayed very much ‘open for business’ throughout the pandemic despite the closure of its buildings and these have re-opened ahead of many library services nationally. Face to face sessions such as bounce & rhyme are up and running and the Summer Reading Challenge for children and young people was well supported. Visit and borrowing numbers are inevitably growing slowly amidst public concerns and public health guidance, though an enhanced digital offer continues to see significant uptake in digital subscriptions for e-book and audio book borrowing. Planning permission has recently been granted to deliver a significantly enhanced library in Bideford.

The recent arrival of around 150 Afghan refugees in Exeter and Exmouth has seen a positive and warm local welcome and impressive multi-agency responses to ensure families have access to health, education, benefit, and language support. Over the coming months the Council and partners will need to develop a sustainable response to ensure families are supported as longer-term welfare, wellbeing and resettlement issues emerge. Small bids for additional MTFS funding have been made to provide much needed additional capacity around poverty, food insecurity and resettlement.

4. Economy, Enterprise and Skills - Head of Service: Keri Denton

The Service is delivering a range of skills and training opportunities, providing a regulatory service and guidance through the joint Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards Service and progressing a number of key infrastructure programmes. The Service is continuing to focus on delivering the Council’s economic recovery package of support, working alongside Team Devon, businesses and public sector partners. Set out below are some of the highlights and achievements from across the Service:

The Service is implementing a Made in Devon programme to support and promote local goods and services, with 11 businesses already participating and over 50 in the pipeline. A range of business adaptation and digital business support services have been launched, offering opportunities for small and medium enterprises:

- Get Set Adapt, support for 480 businesses to adapt their business offer.
- Digital Advance Devon, support for 407 businesses to advance their business through Digital Solutions.
- E-Commerce Pilot, support for 40 businesses to take their product or service fully online.

Upskilling of staff across tourism, retail and hospitality has been piloted and a county-wide skills programme is currently being procured. Support for young people, through a youth hub in Exeter, promoting apprenticeships, working with the Devon and Cornwall Training Provider Network, and working with schools to develop work experience and careers advice are all in train. Over 300 young people and adults have been supported to date, including 50 work placements and 11 formal offers of employment secured through the Youth Hub during its first 12 weeks of operation.

A Green Innovation Fund has been launched to encourage and work with a range of organisations and businesses to support low carbon opportunities and investment in natural capital schemes. The Green Innovation Fund will deliver and showcase action towards our Net Zero ambitions and employ a minimum of 20 new apprenticeships and jobs. This work is delivering elements of the Devon Carbon Plan and driving a clean green growth agenda for the County.

Across the County investment in a set of community energy schemes is underway and Natural Capital Projects. Over the next 18 months 110 Natural Capital Businesses will be supported directly or indirectly, 478 training places created across the sector and 30 jobs created or safeguarded. The Community Energy schemes will support 30 apprenticeships or accredited training places, support 15 businesses and upskill 150 individuals to grow their knowledge of the community energy sector.

New business start-up support is a key strand of the economic recovery programme and the Service has piloted a social enterprise scheme which we are expanding and taking forward, together with a Young People's Entrepreneurship project. This will extend entrepreneurship education and work with 250 aspiring young entrepreneurs to create and launch their business ideas.

The Service has continued to deliver its primary adult and community learning programme through the year through Learn Devon, with 6502 enrolments by individuals engaged over the year, and around 994 enrolments alone to improve individual English and Maths performance. Despite a 27% drop in learner numbers due to COVID, attainment amongst core subjects remained strong across the year with a 4% increase in qualifications being studied. This included notable successes in our GCSE cohort, with 100% of candidates who remained with us throughout COVID achieving a strong pass and a significant increase in the number of individuals accessing a digital course (approximately 871 in 2020/21). The service continued to deliver the majority of provision online with 67% totally online, 23%

blended learning and maintained 10% as face-to-face learning supporting those most requiring support to access learning.

The Service has continued to deliver on the Council's statutory duty to support the progression of all young people from pre-16 to post-16 education and training by commissioning the Transitions contract, awarded to CSW Group. This provides the Council's wraparound tracking and support provision for those young people moving from full time education into new opportunities. Tracking over 29,000 young people in Devon this year, including around 3,000 individuals with a barrier to learning or in need of specialist support, the service continued to offer a tailored service to those at risk of becoming NEET. Despite the onset of COVID and historic changes in the condition of the labour market, NEET levels are showing improvement over the same period as last year. In September 2020, 827 young people in year groups 12-14 were recorded as NEET, accounting for 3.6% of the cohort. In September 2021 this has fallen to 692 young people who are NEET and accounts for 3.0% of the cohort.

Working on behalf of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, and the Department for Education (DfE) the Service is delivering a Careers Hub service. As one of the largest in the country, this now supports all 157 eligible state funded secondary schools and colleges, including SEND and Alternative Provision Academies, and FE colleges across the LEP area. The organisational objectives of the County, the LEP and DfE's Career's Enterprise Company align to the national conversation to drive social mobility and economic growth through improved access to careers education, higher level skills, vocational training, and employment opportunities.

Similarly, the service continues to lead the LEP's Digital Skills Partnership. This small team was successful in securing funding for one of only 3 Digital Bootcamp programmes in the country. Funded by the DfE and aimed at filling specific skills shortages within the Digital Sector, Digital Bootcamps offer short courses of 12-16 weeks for adults aged 19+ with a guaranteed interview at the end of their chosen course. Wave 1 delivered learning to 853 people between January and June 2021, with a programme value of £1,523,728. Wave 2 is currently working with four delivering partners to run 8 different Digital Skills Bootcamps between October 2021 and March 2022 for a further 316 learners with a programme budget of £724,950.

The Council continues to develop strategic partnerships with the Training Provider Network, Higher Education and Further Education providers. An example is the arrangement with the Future Skills Centre (former Flybe Training Academy), which is leased to Exeter College. The centre is nearly at full occupation, delivering a range of skills including construction, IT, and engineering.

The Service continues to deliver the Heart of the South West Growth Hub on behalf of the LEP (4,067 businesses supported), in addition to the Growth Support Programme which delivered 3 and 12 hours of business support to 2439 and 989 SME's respectively. We have also secured funding from DEFRA to deliver a programme to support the food and farming sector, under a Future Farming Resilience programme aimed at supporting 773 farmers and landowners in the Heart of the South West area. The move away from Direct Payments towards Environmental Land Management (ELMs) will be the biggest change for farmers

since the end of the Second World War. This initiative will translate the changes to ensure farming businesses have a better understanding of what the phasing out of Direct Payments will mean for them and the options that are possible for their farm businesses in the future.

The joint Trading Standards Service now includes Plymouth and is operating across the Heart of the South West. It continues to perform strongly, meeting key operational targets and carrying out some major investigations. There has been a focus on prevention and business support throughout the last 12 months. Examples include a campaign to tackle financial scams with a specific focus on educating younger people who are increasingly becoming victims, a project developed in partnership with the Property Ombudsman to provide business support and interventions to all letting agents in our service delivery area and a project which focused on farmers' mental health and wellbeing. The latter was awarded the national Chartered Trading Standards Institute Award for best project, in presenting the award CTSI Chief Executive, John Herriman, said: "Everything about this campaign demonstrates trading standards professionals going above and beyond to support the communities they serve. The project speaks volumes for the importance of key stakeholders collaborating to deliver a comprehensive support service to a particularly vulnerable community who have welcomed the help."

The Service leads on the County Council's input in the Connecting Devon and Somerset programme which is delivering an additional 56,000 full fibre connections under six contracts awarded at the end of December 2020. The development and management of our employment land and industrial estate has continued at pace. At Roundswell South, the Enterprise Centre – NODE is operational and has firm levels of occupation, and recently funding has been approved to extend the facility. The Exeter Science Park continues to expand and a further building is nearing completion and the Ada Lovelace Building is fully operational and has good levels of occupation. Our Work Hubs programme has expanded capacity with 5 new projects in construction at Great Torrington, High Bickington, Ilfracombe, Newton Abbot and Teignmouth and includes an expansion of the existing Hub in Tavistock. A further 10 locations will be joining the work hubs network in the coming year bringing the total number to 28.

Economic evidence and intelligence to support briefings to a range of stakeholders has continued throughout the year, supporting the development of business cases into Government, and securing investment from the LEP. The Service has supported the development of a range of programme and projects under the Community Renewal Fund – the outcome of which is awaited and contributed to the submission of the Levelling Up Fund proposals. More recently the Service is leading and co-ordinating the Council's engagement in the Plymouth and South Devon Freezone, which has the potential to accelerate higher paid employment opportunities and increase productivity through the advancement of key opportunities across the marine, defence, space and advanced manufacturing sectors.

Dave Black - Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Simon Kitchen - Head of Communities

Keri Denton - Head of Economy, Enterprise and Skills

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools: Councillor Andrew Leadbetter

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

Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery and Skills: Councillor Rufus Gilbert

Cabinet Member for Highway Management: Councillor Stuart Hughes

Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate and Asset Management: Councillor John Hart

Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality: Councillor Roger
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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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| Background Paper | Date | File Reference |
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| Nil | | |

Service Delivery for PTE Communities and EES In-Year Briefing - Final