

## **REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND SKILLS**

### **1 Introduction**

This report summarises recent decisions, meetings, progress, and examples of service developments encompassed by my Cabinet remit for: economic development; employment, training and skills; the provision of trading standards and consumer protection; and securing the future delivery and direction of services.

### **2 Decisions**

At its meeting on 29/4/24 the Council agreed, following public consultation during February and March 2024, to submit the final proposal for the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (DTCCA) to Government. The Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, has formally consented to the making of the DTCCA Regulations 2024 which will create the DTCCA (minute 276(d) from the 29/4/24 Council refers). The Regulations are currently going through the Parliamentary process to become law and it is anticipated that the DTCCA will be established in February 2025. There is a report elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting relating to the nomination of members of the DTCCA and its scrutiny and audit committees. On 20/11/24, the Leader of the Council, (as Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate and Asset Management) decided that the County Council will be the accountable body for the DTCCA.

At its meeting on 29/4/24, the Council agreed to support the establishment of the Team Devon Joint Committee to formalise the existing partnership, address shared priorities and have a voice in the work of the DTCCA.

At its meeting on 10/7/24, the Cabinet agreed the areas of focus for the Corporate Plan 2024/25 and Directorate priorities for improvement in 2024/25. It also endorsed the proposal to monitor the Corporate Plan 2024/25 through the Council's new corporate performance framework. At its meeting on 13/11/24 the Cabinet noted the updated performance framework including the strategic plan indicators, together with progress on corporate and directorate improvement plan priorities for 2024-25. It also agreed that a Performance Board for the Council be established drawing together finance, governance, workforce and risks.

### **3 Meetings**

Participation in the September 2024 launch of the Devon Housing Commission report in the House of Commons.

### **4 Service Issues and Updates**

#### ***Heart of the South West Trading Standards Service***

HotSW Trading Standards work is intelligence led, responding to consumer complaints and requests for business support from traders. Priority areas include,

Animal Health and Welfare/Disease Control, Doorstep Crime/Rogue Traders, Food Allergens, Scams and illicit Tobacco/Cigarettes.

Trading Standards featured on the BBC TV series SAS: Catching the Criminals highlighting the work to tackle and disrupt the supply of illicit tobacco and vape products. The service seized illegal tobacco and vapes worth more than £10,000 during an operation in Exmouth.

Trading Standards officers carried out a multi-agency operation with the Animal & Plant Health Agency, the Police and the RSPCA in September 2024 in response to a complaint about poultry welfare on a farm in Devon. In May 2024, the service rehomed a herd of cattle that it had taken possession of following numerous visits to the farm where each time cattle were found in an unsuitable environment and with deteriorating welfare.

As of 18 November, Trading Standards Service reverted to being part of the Public Health and Communities Directorate.

### ***Partnerships***

Since the Cabinet agreed the Devon County University Civic Agreement 2023-2026 in July 2023, progress has been made with the young people, skills and innovation, and housing themes. Examples include forming a new Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay Education Alliance to raise attainment through tutoring and mentoring models and exploring approaches to support schools and colleges with their work young people with SEND and SEMH needs. Skills assets have been created, including a Social Care Skills Escalator to support sector training and recruitment, and a new suite of dashboards investigating the local labour market, devised in partnership with the Local Skills Improvement Partnership (LSIP).

The Prosper Programme has been delivered in Exeter, East and Mid Devon using UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) to support businesses with general, start up, job creation and green business support.

The Future Farm Resilience Programme is being delivered across Dorset, Somerset Devon & Cornwall using £2.6 million of DEFRA funding to support farmers with reductions in basic payments.

The Devon Food Partnership is enabling collaboration and communication between internal and external food stakeholders across the county and has launched Devon's Good Food Strategy 2023-2028.

The Agri-Events programme is supporting partnership working and knowledge exchange to grow and foster innovation in the agriculture sector across East, Mid, and West Devon and South Hams, funded through UKSPF.

The Growth Hub continues to provide a free support and referral service for any businesses in Devon, Somerset, Plymouth, and Torbay including digital business support and in-depth business advice provided through the UKSPF Prosper programme.

An update on the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) programme has been shared with Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Scrutiny. Superfast connectivity currently stands at 93.6% against a 95% target for the area. Engagement continues with Government over its centrally run Project Gigabit programme and delivery in Devon. No build plans are ready to be shared currently.

### ***Economic infrastructure***

The £16million capital grant programme was launched last month, funding green projects, themed around housing, business, skills and infrastructure. It includes the £1.8m Green Impact Fund led by the County Council.

Following St Modwens exit from Skypark Development Partnership, priorities for Skypark include a review of opportunities to simplify operation from the previous arrangement. The Local Development Order has been produced and is due out for consultation this month, seeking approval from East Devon District Council in early 2025.

### ***Learn Devon***

Learn Devon provides English and Maths qualifications and support including delivery of engagement programmes through Multiply. It has developed a tenancy programme, developed with District Councils, corporate parenting and transition teams to support care leavers and young asylum seekers gain and demonstrate the skills and knowledge to become a responsible tenant. Learn Devon is delivering English courses for speakers of other languages in Exeter to Young Asylum seekers, at the request of the Virtual school to ensure young asylum seekers receive education and support prior to joining Exeter College at the start of each academic year.

### ***Training and Skills***

The Careers Hub supports 118 schools and colleges across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay with a focus on providing work experience with employers, supporting low social mobility and removing anxiety barriers for young people. It has offered over 1000 places with 5% of these taking up the offer being Care Experienced or Young Carers. In 2023-24 the team have also offered apprenticeships, a partnership with Exeter and City college supporting 50 young people, and created 49 new apprentice ambassadors. The team have targeted interventions for those economically disadvantaged or facing barriers include 'Empowering Girls' - with 130 mentors supporting 600 girls across 18 schools, mentoring for care experienced young people via the virtual school for 50 young people and 8 schools.

The Positive About Care Experience (PACE) programme has been developed by Devon County Council (DCC) in partnership with Exeter College and aims to provide opportunity and employment for our care experienced young people. The DfE funded supported Internship programme for young people with SEND or who are care-experienced is in its third and final year. It has helped over 120 young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan secure an internship for 2024/5.

This is the fifth year of the Train4Tomorrow Skills Bootcamps programme, which has supported over 5,000 adults to upskill and move into high-demand job roles in

health, social care, digital, technical, and Devon's green economy. The Skills Bootcamps are free to learners and offer the opportunity to undertake rapid training (less than 16 weeks) and access interviews for live vacancies.

Employment and Youth Hubs have been set up in three new areas across the county – East (Honiton), Mid (Tiverton and Cullompton) and North (Barnstaple). The existing Exeter Youth Hub has been extended to offer a service to those aged 24+ to mirror provision available in the other areas. Additional pop-up sites are offered in Ilfracombe, South Molton and Sidmouth.

## **5 Conclusion**

The report demonstrates the breadth of work taking place within the Performance and Partnerships Directorate on a wide variety of fronts: all contributing to the wellbeing of people and communities across Devon.