

## **Combined Budget Scrutiny Recommendations: 30<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

### **Welcomes and supports:**

1. The overall increase in the budget of 5.9%, specifically the 8.2% increase in the budget for Integrated Adult Social Care and the 5.5% increase in the Children and Young People's Futures Budget. Scrutiny is pleased to see recognition of growth and demand in the system. Scrutiny welcomes the uplift in National Minimum Allowance for foster carers, investment in Special Guardianship or adoption arrangements, improvements to the Regional Adoption Agency service, and Early Help and the £1.5 million investment in Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.
2. Recognises:
  - a. The efforts and work of the Council and staff to develop a clear and comprehensive draft 2025/2026 budget;
  - b. The work and efforts of Integrated Adult Social staff to deliver the 2024/2025 service budget to be within 1% of the target budget at month 8 highlighting the importance of maintaining strategic continuity, and welcomes this continued effort into 2025/2026;
  - c. The efforts of Devon County Council staff to deliver transformation, support the most vulnerable people and provide essential services;
  - d. The Council's focus and prioritisation of the dedicated schools grant (DSG) high needs block and work with the Government on Devon's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Safety Valve;
  - e. The welcoming of the Fostering Task Group and implementation of most recommendations within the 2025/2026 Budget.
3. The service improvements within Directorates, including:
  - a. The efforts of Devon County Council staff to improve outcomes for young people and achieve budget reductions in Independent Post 18 placements;
  - b. Working holistically to secure network efficiency within Homes to School Transport;
  - c. The opening of 64 Support Base places for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and the resultant budget reductions;
  - d. The introduction of block contracting with Independent Schools and the resultant budget reductions;
  - e. The investment, improvements and delivery of Targeted Early Help, including the opportunities this provides to support the recruitment and retention of staff.
  - f. The savings achieved from a reduction in energy rates and further dimming of street lighting.
4. The work started with partners to develop ways of highlighting the complexity of delivering equitable services across both the rural and urban population of Devon taking account of the multiple indices of deprivation that exist.

**Record concern:**

1. The potential impact of the National Insurance threshold changes on the care workforce, and the cost of implementing those changes potentially exposing weaknesses within the care market.
2. The lateness of Government confirmation of the Public Health Grant for 2025/2026, the relatively low level of funding Devon receives per head of the population and, the Government's inconsistent prioritisation of prevention.
3. The realism of achieving the savings outlined across the budget, particularly:
  - a. The £1.7m agency staff cost savings considering that the regional agency pay cap has not yet been agreed;
  - b. The £14.7 million transfer to the dedicated schools grant deficit in light of the cost pressures arising from clearing the backlog of education, health and care plans (EHCPs), and the increasing number of applications for EHCP assessments.
4. The Core Spending Power increase, excluding Council Tax, at 2.05% being the lowest of the 21 county councils in England, before Council Tax.
5. On the future funding of the youth service and any reduction in the number of youth service staff.

**Cabinet be asked to:**

1. Work with partners to seek assurance that the process to apply for free school meals is user-friendly and promoted to families across Devon as one of the keys to supporting additional funding into the County, and welcomes an approach to auto-enrolment.
2. Work with partners, including the Department for Work and Pensions, to be assured that people are able to access the benefits they are entitled to and support the Council to have greater assurance about potential links to Devon's strategy and funding.
3. Work with other comparable Authorities to build a case for Devon to support and enhance Government understanding of the needs of Devon's population, highlighting the patterns of health inequality, deprivation, rural poverty, social mobility and the costs of delivering services within a large rural County. For Devon this includes the relatively low levels of funding per head of the population the Council receives including in Education, Public Health, Transport costs, the impact of the removal of the Rural Services Delivery Grant and challenges within the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities budget, with the aim of achieving fairer funding.
4. Recognising the increasing and aging population in Devon and the increase in a Dementia diagnosis, work with partners, including the NHS, to develop Dementia friendly communities and promote the importance of people planning for their futures, which dovetails with local care partnerships, to support sustainable budget delivery into future years for both the Council and its partners.

5. Recognising the increase in complexity of working age adults with eligible care needs, work with partners, including the NHS, to support and enable working age adults and the market to plan and for future needs that helps people in Devon to live as independently as possible for longer.
6. Lobby Government to increase the funding the Council receives to support Young Asylum Seekers.
7. Support and work with Overview and Scrutiny in 2025/26 on the following:
  - a. The interconnectedness of the range of national reforms including to Childrens Social Care, and from integrated approaches to prevention: for example preventing violence to women and girls, and early years;
  - b. Conversations and policy development to implement the National Government Reforms to Children's Social Care;
  - c. A conversation with all Members on the ethics of Artificial Intelligence and its future use.
8. Following the final Local Government settlement, if further money is available, consider further investment in:
  - a) Early help and intervention services to continue to support and build the Council's enhanced early help offer.
  - b) Increase the Members' Locality Budgets to £8,000 per year
  - c) Increase the budget allocated to waste minimisation activity and work with District Councils to improve recycling rates and support the rationalisation of the types of recycling collections across Devon
  - d) Invest further in flood prevention and highway drainage,
  - e) Maintain investment in accommodation on the County Farms estate to ensure it is of a sufficient standard.