

Cllr Andrew Saywell DCC Report for Frithelstock Annual Parish Meeting – April 2025

It has been another 'interesting' year in local government. The change in Government past summer has had quite a dramatic impact on local government in Devon, and I've summarised these changes below.

Devolution/Local Government Reorganisation

As you may know, the Government announced their intention to abolish Devon County Council and Torridge District Council and replace them and the other District Councils in Devon with a unitary authority.

To cut a long story short, despite the Council's imminent abolition, elections to DCC will still be taking place in May. However before that, the Government set a deadline for March 21st for interim local government reorganisation proposals to be submitted. Following meetings with Government officials, the Council received guidance that multiple indicative proposals can be submitted.

A Special Full Council meeting was held on March 20th to discuss this matter and a huge amount of work has taken place on these indicative proposals, working with a myriad of community partners to assess the pros and cons of the following potential models:

- two unitary authorities – one covering Plymouth and another covering the rest of Devon
- a two unitary north Devon/South Devon split, with one council for Plymouth, Teignbridge, South Hams and Torbay and another for Exeter, East Devon, North Devon, Torridge, West Devon and Mid Devon
- a two unitary south west and north east split, with one council for Plymouth, South Hams and West Devon and another for Exeter, East Devon, Torbay, Teignbridge, North Devon, Torridge and Mid Devon
- a three unitary option of Plymouth, greater Exeter (formed of Exeter, East Devon and Mid Devon) and the rest of Devon
- a three unitary option, with Plymouth remaining on existing boundaries, a new unitary council formed of Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon and Torridge and another made up of Torbay, South Hams, Teignbridge and West Devon
- Also modelled for benchmarking purposes only is the option of a single unitary authority covering the whole of Devon.

The proposals align with ministerial guidance which says that new unitary councils should have minimum populations of 500,000 people each and align with existing district council boundaries.

These proposals are **indicative** only. Within the tight deadline the Government gave us, none of the Councils in Devon have the data available or analysed properly to work out which options work or do not work.

With the County Election on the 1st of May, it's important that this document is a sound basis for the new Council to pick up the work over the coming months. The new Council will make the decision on what to submit to government on the 28th of November 2025.

The two key points I would make, whatever is finally agreed is 1. **The Unitary/Unitaries has to work for the residents of Devon.** 2. **It has to be financially sustainable.**

Other Matters

DCC Budget – The final budget was agreed by DCC Full Council in February.

The other major impact Devon has faced has been the abolition of the Rural Services Grant, months before we were due to set a budget. This represented a loss of circa £10million for the Authority.

thankfully, the additional income from the second homes council tax charge has recouped some of this lost funding and has ensured we have a balanced budget and no major service reductions or cuts.

There will be an additional £4m going into the Highways Budget... though had the Rural Services Grant not been taken away I think we could have found an extra £10m from the Second Homes Council Tax for Highways. Instead, this funding has had to go into other services to prevent major cutbacks within Adult Social Care or Children's Services.

Overall the net revenue budget rises to £784 million. Of which approx. £383 million is for Adult Social Care (up 8.2%) and £237 million is for Children's Services (up 5.5%). That leaves a rather more modest circa £164 million for everything else from roads to libraries...

If you wonder why the roads are bad this is the reason why. You can NOT cut someone's Care package to fund Highways maintenance. However, you can cut Highways maintenance to fund Social Care...

Siren voices who think better contract management will sort the problem are bluntly, living in cloud cuckoo land. We need sustained, multimillion pound increases in the Highways Budget but if that funding continues to be eaten up by social care spend it will be very, very difficult.

And finally – as you may have seen, I will be standing down from the County Council in May to pursue a new career in the aviation industry as a commercial pilot. I have outlined my reasons why in the email I sent to the Parish Council and in the Torrington Crier so won't repeat them here. However, I would like to thank the Parish for their support over the eight years I've had the honour to represent them in local government. I will miss working with Frithelstock, it is a lovely community to represent and, despite all of the challenges, we have got things done from getting proper police enforcement on the A388 to dragon patching and road repairs throughout the Parish.

I remain fully committed to my role until polling day on May 1st so any problems between now and then please do get in touch as I am still here to help until then!

See you around,
Andrew