

## **County Councillor Report**

Last month we had an incredible day at Farmwise Devon at Westpoint! The whole event was absolutely buzzing with excitement as children got hands-on learning about where their food comes from - from farm to fork. It was fantastic to see so many young people inspired by farming, food, and the natural world around them. Events like this really show the power of education outside the classroom. At Devon County Council we are calling on government to embed food and farming into the national curriculum — and to see more events like Farmwise happening right across the country. [Farmwise returns to teach children in Devon where their food comes from | News - Greatest Hits Radio \(Devon\)](#)

[Devon Councillors urge government action to protect farming communities amid rising pressures - News](#)

I was flooded with emails from concerned residents about the lack of NHS dentistry provision locally, particularly with the loss of an NHS dentist in Great Torrington where *mydentist* has automatically moved people over to private dental care (including children). I have contacted our MP about the situation and have sent a letter to the chair and chief exec of NHS Integrated Care Board as a matter of urgency to find out what can be done locally. I am still waiting to hear back. [Outrage as Devon families 'removed' from NHS list](#)

As you know, my cabinet role has a very broad remit, and as well as everything else it also includes refugees and resettlement. Following the protests which had been taking place outside of the Asylum hotel near Exeter, a visit was arranged for me and the Leader of the council to go inside, meet with the staff and also the local organisations helping the asylum seekers. We wanted to show solidarity and compassion to these people who have experienced so much trauma to get here. We saw mothers and babies and families and were told there are people from more than 20 different nationalities there, and all are either women or families. My own children had made some cards and friendship bracelets for the children there and we are arranging for others to send in cards of support and kindness. It's something very small but these things can make a real difference.

Southwest Ambulance Service came back to DCC's Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee meeting 22<sup>nd</sup> September and the committee remained extremely concerned. I also spoke against SWAST's decision to phase out the fire co-responder service across Devon and the rest of the Southwest. The County Council are requesting they abandon this decision as we believe it puts lives at risk in rural communities.

[Devon fires back: Ambulance trust urged to reconsider fire co-responder phase-out | Mid Devon Advertiser](#)

We are also having a consultation in relation to Devon's library service and this is being launched later this month- looking at how we can do things differently to create a long-term library strategy, taking into account the financial pressures but also looking at other opportunities- for example new technology and "open access" which is used successfully in other parts of the country to improve opening hours beyond staffed hours, and opening up opportunities for different groups and organisations to make best use of the library spaces as we see them more and more evolving into community hubs, not just places to take out books.

#### [Residents to be asked for their views on the future of Devon's library service - News](#)

I am organising lots of informal meetings at briefings at the moment with officers and organisations, particularly in relation to digital exclusion, rural deprivation, and how to better support isolated and rural communities. Hopefully we can help to develop more solutions in partnership.

We also had another meeting with the Chief executive of Stagecoach who has reconsidered the current pricing zones and we hope he will soon be making an announcement in relation to a bigger zone in North Devon (currently only the Barnstaple zone) which we hope will be an improvement, especially for those living in Great Torrington.

#### **Local Government Reorganisation:**

- [We've published our proposal for a simpler, stronger and more sustainable Devon - Inside Devon - news](#)
- Devon County Council has now published its proposal for a new unitary council for the whole of Devon, also respecting the current unitaries in Plymouth and Torbay. This new unitary would include the county and the current Devon districts, and is known as the 9:1:1.
- This proposal was debated in a Full Council at County Hall, livestreamed, on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> November, and advice from that council was passed to DCC Cabinet, which then made the final decision on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> November.
- The Devon County Council proposal makes a strong case that the most significant services, children's services and adult's services, will benefit from the scale of a large unitary, and that there is significant risk in breaking the current county area into smaller unitaries to their conservation and improvement.
- The Devon County Council concept also centres on Neighbourhood Area Committees in Localities across the county. Likely to be 16 committees with local populations of 50,000, these committees will include towns & parishes, the voluntary sector, NHS, Police, Fire Service, business, chambers of commerce and more. Each committee will have 6 or 7 unitary councillors,

- The committees could take on a number of powers but these are yet to be defined by government. The way they are funded will emerge as the consultation in the new year begins, but there would be a commitment to having a Cabinet member for NACs, IT support, democratic officer support etc provided by the new unitary. One of the key ideas underpinning the new NACs is to mitigate the democratic deficit caused by the loss of district councils. If done well, they provide for the first time a single forum for all tiers of local government.
- Ideas from across Devon must be submitted by 28<sup>th</sup> November. It is expected that the districts will put forward 4:5:1, county 9:1:1, Exeter a new expanded unitary, Plymouth an expansion on their current unitary. Torbay is not yet clear and political decisions are yet to be made. They certainly wish to retain their current footprint, but in recent days an idea has come forward for them to expand their boundaries.
- The Secretary of State then assesses which proposals he wants to put out for consultation in the new year. This will be with other statutory consultees and not the public.
- In July he will make a decision as to the chosen option, but this date on previous evidence is likely to slip. Elections to an interim authority would be in May 2027, with the authority going fully live on vesting day in April 2028.

Finally, I really want to emphasise again the new grant fund we have set up at Devon County Council. Designed by young people, for young people 😊 Please share with your local youth groups. I would encourage them to apply for the £3000 because you never know 😊 ! It's very easy to apply and has been designed by the Devon Youth Council who designed the fund and they are on the team who sign off the applications (and so am I!). The young people would really like to see new groups and activities being set up if possible so please encourage anyone who you think might be interested. With it being a brand new fund we really want to get the word out there. It doesn't require match funding and it can cover wages if needed. <https://www.devon.gov.uk/news/new-grant-fund-laims-to-enrich-the-lives-of-devons-young-people/>

If there are any safety defects or other highways type issues please do report them here: [Report a problem - Roads and transport](#)

Grit bins can be requested via [Grit bins and salt bags - Roads and transport](#)

Speed concerns can be raised from the “report a concern” link at [Speeding, Speed Limits and SCARF - Roads and transport](#)

Best wishes,

Cheryl

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