

County Councillor report

Libraries:

We were really pleased to successfully receive grant funding from central government to support modernisation of many of our libraries. The £200k from central government was match funded with £100k from DCC and £100k from Libraries Unlimited

[Funding awarded to upgrade technology in Devon's Libraries - News](#)

The results of the extensive library consultation are currently being considered and a report is going to cabinet 20th May where decisions will be made on the future of the service. My personal preference is that we should invest significantly more into the library service, with a transformation programme, working together with town councils and local communities to integrate more services into library spaces, grow the volunteer base, modernise the service and make them more resilient into the future. [Bid to protect Devon libraries with £1m boost - News](#)

[Devon's library opening hours could be protected as community rallies to save service - Latest From ITV News](#)

Train 4 Tomorrow:

More funding has been secured to deliver skills bootcamps across Devon. This opens up such fantastic opportunities for people looking to upskill or change career. Please do spread the word. [Extra funding will help more adults access Train4Tomorrow Skills Bootcamps - News](#)

Local councillor grants:

Our locality budget has increased to £10,000 this year which is great news for local communities. Please get in touch if there is a project or organisation which you feel could benefit from some funding. I am also pleased to say the youth grant has reopened with £160,000 available in the form of small grants to support groups and activities for young people aged 11-25

[Almost £400,000 went to community projects, local events and good causes last year - News](#)

[PLACES TO GO THINGS TO DO Grant Fund - for Young People - Communities](#)

[Locality budgets - Democracy in Devon](#)

Visit with North Devon MP to WM Ironwork Ltd, Newton Tracey:

I was pleased to visit WM Ironwork Ltd in Newton Tracey recently, alongside North Devon MP Ian Roome. Founded in 1977, this family-run business has grown from a small local workshop into one of the South West's leading steelwork companies, now employing over 100 people and delivering bespoke projects across the UK.

The company has evolved from its agricultural manufacturing roots—well known locally for products such as the sheep turnover crate—into a diverse operation, with around half of current production focused on balconies for the construction sector.



It was encouraging to hear about their apprenticeship programme, including meeting a female apprentice who is developing skills and working towards a manufacturing qualification. Opportunities like this are vital for young people in our rural communities.

We also discussed challenges facing the business, including rising energy costs, difficulties recruiting skilled staff, and the importance of fast and reliable broadband—an issue I am actively pursuing. Although just outside my division, the business has strong

ties to Torrington Rural, and I was delighted to support and highlight this important local employer

Meeting with Professor Sir Chris Whitty:

It was a real pleasure to welcome Sir Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer, to Devon and to have the opportunity to speak honestly about the realities facing our rural communities.



During his visit, we highlighted some of the biggest challenges affecting people across Devon: the lack of affordable housing for local people, low wages, an ageing population, poor public transport, and the steady decline of local services. We also discussed how increasing digitisation is deepening inequalities, with more services moving online and many people being left behind because they are digitally excluded.

We also spoke about the particular difficulties facing young people in rural areas, including limited transport, fewer opportunities, barriers to training and employment, and the sense of isolation that can come with growing up in dispersed communities.

Sir Chris Whitty was particularly interested in hearing about the farming sector. I spoke about the growing pressures and stresses facing farmers, and

the increasing isolation that comes with modern farming systems. Farming is not simply a job, it is a way of life, and for many it continues well into later life. The shift from traditional, shared labour to increasingly solitary working patterns has had a real impact on wellbeing and connection in rural communities. I also mentioned the importance of Young Farmers Clubs!

It was encouraging to hear Sir Chris speak about the importance of trusted people and trusted spaces in delivering public health services, and we discussed the opportunities for better outreach across dispersed rural populations.

It was fantastic to have Sir Chris visit us here in Devon, and what stood out most was that he was genuinely listening. He recognised that national averages, including the Index of Multiple Deprivation, often fail to reflect the lived reality of rural communities. We discussed how measures in the IMD such as car ownership, are treated as indicators of relative affluence, when in rural areas a car is not a luxury but a necessity for getting to work, accessing healthcare, reaching schools, and simply managing daily life. He agreed that these averages often miss the reality of rural deprivation and he placed real emphasis on the need for more granular local data to strengthen our case and ensure that rural issues, not only specific to Devon, but for the whole of England, are properly understood in policy making.

A very valuable visit, and an important conversation for Devon.

[Chief Medical Officer, Sir Chris Whitty, explores the health challenges in rural Devon - News](#)

Great Torrington Mayfair:

I was honoured to take part in the Mayfair celebrations in Great Torrington this year, and was even more honoured to be invited by the Mayor to speak as part of the formal proclamation ceremony. The weather was glorious for the whole morning, including the crowning of the May Queen, and the children were absolutely wonderful.

I think we all loved this year's theme: Galileo- Sun, Moon and Stars. They all shone so brightly in the sunshine! Huge thanks to every single person who worked so hard to make it happen.

