

PRESENT:

North Ward:

Councillor D Bushby
Councillor P S Christie
Councillor T Johns
Councillor D McGeough

South Ward:

Councillor S Inch
Councillor Mrs S Langford
Councillor P Lawrence

West Ward:

Councillor D Ratcliff

East Ward:

Councillor Mrs R M Craigie
Councillor Mrs L Hellyer
Councillor Mrs J Gubb (Town Mayor)
Councillor J A McKenzie

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs H Blackburn (Town Clerk)
Mr R Coombes (Deputy Town Clerk)
Revered C Rose-Casemore (St Mary's Church)
1 x Member of the Public

76. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Mrs K A Corfe (West Ward – Personal) and C Hawkins (West Ward – illness).

77. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND ANY REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION ON ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Councillor P Christie declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 18 (Trustee, Bridge Trust).

78. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION OF 15 MINUTES DURATION

A Member of the Public questioned the Council's avowed commitment to the "Climate Emergency," and their prospects of attaining Carbon neutrality by 2030.

The Member, fearing for the lives of young and old people, referred to the poor state of the Allhalland and Mill Street bollards, suggested that the Council should write to Devon County Council.

79. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 September 2022 were approved as a correct record.

(Vote – For: 10, Abstention: 2, Against: 0)

80. ACCOUNTS

It was proposed by Councillor Bushby, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the List of Payments be approved.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

81. FIRE SERVICE (WRITTEN) REPORT

Members had received a Fire Service Report which is attached and forms part of these Minutes.

82. DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL (COUNCILLOR) REPORT

Members had received two reports which are attached and forms part of these Minutes.

Councillor Mrs Hellyer expanded on her report noting that the Bideford Library will provide warm rooms and there will be free coffee mornings during November.

A new Traffic Order will address the Mill Street vehicle issues once in place before the end of March 2023. The process has been slow, complicated and delayed by other urgent issues. There will be no bollards but signs in place. Community Enforcement Officers will be able to "ticket," offenders (currently only the Police have authority to deal with those that transgress the law).

She explained the relationship between the County Council and local MPs, gave detail on budget management and the cost of Special Needs Services.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Mrs Hellyer for her contribution including her (DCC) report.

83. COMMUNITY ARCHIVE (UPDATE) PRESENTATION

The nominated speaker was unable to attend and had forwarded their apologies.

84. COMMUNICATION BROUGHT FORWARD ON THE DIRECTION OF THE MAYOR / TOWN CLERK

The Town Clerk advised:

- a. 11 November 2022. Armistice Day, the Mayor will lay a wreath at St Mary's Church Memorial, the Deputy Mayor will lay a wreath at the Victoria Park Memorial and Councillor Mrs Hellyer will lay a wreath at Chudleigh Fort.
- b. 13 November 2022. Remembrance Sunday, the Town Hall will be open from 09.45 am, councillors to be robed by 10.15 am.
- c. 3 December 2022. Signing of the Lease, the Town Hall will be open from 09.45 am, councillors to be robed by 10.15 am.

The Mayor advised that Bideford Rotary had engaged with Community Education Programmes, including sanitation, through a Twinning Toilets in Uganda and South Sudan initiative. The Mayor had taken part in a "Toilet Twinning" Ceremony, with the Rotary, confirming Council support allowing for the raising of funds.

The Mayor led discussion on the challenges faced by NDDH and the wider NHS at Exeter and Plymouth Hospitals.

It was noted that Bideford MIU staff were relocated during the Pandemic which had led to the closure of the department.

85. MARKET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

- a. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 September 2022 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 11, Against: 0, Abstention: 1)

- b. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 November 2022 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 11, Against: 0, Abstention: 1)

86. STAFFING, FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES (SF&GP) COMMITTEE MEETING

- a. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 September 2022 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

- b. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 October 2022 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

87. TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 October 2022 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

88. PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 and 26 October 2022 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

89. LLANDIVISIAU TWINNING ASSOCIATION RECEPTION – 27 MAY 2023

Members considered the request by the Twinning Association to hold the Landivisiau Twinning Reception on the morning of Saturday, 27 May 2023.

Proposed by Councillor Inch and

RESOLVED: That the Council host the reception for the Twinning Association on the morning of Saturday, 27 May 2023 in the Pannier Market.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

90. BIDEFORD – 450TH ANNIVERSARY

The Chairman indicated that the Bideford Fair will hold activities in commemorating the Anniversary; there will also be a Civic Event on Sunday, 10 December 2023.

Councillor Inch welcomed input from fellow councillors; Councillor Ratcliff suggested inviting Community involvement.

Councillor Christie offered to post “a form of words,” on his various historical media platforms.

Councillor Inch suggested reintroducing the quarterly Newsletter although Councillor McGeough believed the cost to be prohibitive, noting the Members’ prolific traffic on / engagement with social media.

Councillor Mrs Hellyer, whilst concurring with Councillor McGeough, advocated using the Link magazine; the Chairman confirmed that this sat well with the Tourism Committee.

91. BIDEFORD TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP (BTCP)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 October 2022 were received.

Councillor McKenzie reiterated his concerns over monies allocated by the Council to the Chamber of Commerce, should be returned, from BTCP, should it be confirmed that it was not used for the purpose that it was given.

The former Chairman of the Chamber will be contacted.

92. TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL – UPDATE

Councillor Bushby led discussion on the results of a meeting, held in camera, considering the Homeless and the lack of Social Housing. Points included:

- potential sites to build social housing on and their merits,
- the numbers of Homeless families,
- empty properties,
- the cost.

Further points included contingency support for families from Ukraine and monies to be drawn from the Rural Prosperity Fund.

Councillor Mrs Craigie made a plea that the Council does not allow for the open space on Cliveden Road to be developed in the future.

93. BRIDGE TRUST

He advised that the Trust would make provision, to those recipients of Foodbank services, tokens redeemable in the Town's Coffee shops (to be distributed by TTVS).

The business of the meeting having been completed, the Mayor thanked the members for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 7.37 pm.

BIDEFORD TOWN COUNCIL - Accounts for approval at the Town Council Meeting - 3 November 2022

PV NO	ALLOCATION	VAT	NET	TOTAL
1	006784 R Coombes		71.14	71.14
2	8/11 Wills Tree Services			
		300.00	1,500.00	1,800.00
3	8/11 Enterprise			
		164.92	824.58	989.50
4	8/11 R Braddick			
			72.00	72.00
5	8/11 RGB			
		1.03	5.16	6.19
6	8/11 Bights			
		30.55	152.74	183.29
7	8/11 Manick Signs			
		8.32	41.58	49.90
8	8/11 South West Heritage Trust			
			4000.00	4,000.00
9	DD Clarity Copiers			
		8.04	40.18	48.22
		512.86	6,707.38	7,220.24
	Bank Balances at 1 Nov 22			
			12,727.38	
	Bank Balances at 1 Nov 22			
			625,000.00	

Minute Number 6. – Fire Service Report.

As a service we are back to business-as-usual following Covid.

Keeping the fire appliances fully crewed at Bideford is still my number one priority to be able to attend emergency incidents not just in the Bideford area but also in the wider community.

We have 20 firefighters at Bideford with three new recruits and another starting their basic fitness and having passed their online examinations.

We have had an extremely busy summer due to the dry and hot conditions attending many incidents, exhausting resources. We had 57 calls in July most of these were fires including houses, costal, forestry and woodland/hedges. Some of these unfortunately were due to discarded barbeques and bonfires spreading out of control.

The most recent substantial fire was at Specsavers in the High Street which also involved Costa Coffee, the block of flats to the left and The Quay dentist Practice. This was a 10 pump Multi agency incident with a monitoring process over several days checking for fire spread. Good intervention from the Bideford crews who attended first preventing fire spread to adjacent properties and ensuring all persons were evacuated in nearby properties. Bideford crews spent over 11 hours that day on the fire without any substantial breaks.

We managed to work with the adjacent businesses involved to enable them to open the following day.

Our other biggest risks are the river Torridge, Appledore shipbuilders and several large factories/warehouses.

We are still providing drivers with additional skills to assist the ambulance service crews due to their ever increasing demand, we currently have four at Bideford.

Fire Safety

There are currently no high level Fire Safety Enforcement Action taking place on any businesses in the Bideford area. We are continuing to audit high risk premises such as Hospitals, care homes and large factories.

Community Safety

We have just launched our winter fire safety campaign called 'Save safely'. We've created this campaign in response to the cost-of-living crisis, to encourage people to think about fire safety when it comes to saving money.

We're focusing on three main things to help keep people safe.

1. Check smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.

You should have working smoke alarms on every level of your home, and a carbon monoxide alarm in every room where fuel is burned (this includes gas cookers, open fires, and log burners).

2. Use heaters safely.

Keep them at least one metre (3.3ft) away from everything. Never dry clothes on heaters.

3. Avoid using candles.

If you must use them, put them in proper fire-retardant holders, and keep away from anything that could catch fire

Heating your home safely

With energy prices rising, the fire service knows you may need some help staying warm.

If you need to heat only a small area of your home, a portable heater is more efficient and cost-effective. The fire service recommends an electric oil-filled radiator (pictured) rather than any other type of heater.

Heaters can be a serious fire hazard, they should always be placed (at least one metre) away from curtains, bedding and upholstery and switched off and unplugged before you go out or go to bed.

Candles are not a safe or efficient way to heat your home.

Open fires and wood burners

Have your chimney swept before the first fire, and then sweep it at least once a year (and every three months if you're burning wood).

Only burn seasoned wood. Other wood may have moisture which can create tar in the chimney. This is highly flammable and can lead to chimney fires.

Other ways to keep warm

Electric blankets are a great way to keep warm, but they need to be used with care. Check electric blankets for wear and tear, and always replace after 10 years.

Never use wheat bags in a bed.

Book in for a free home fire safety visit

A friendly home fire safety adviser can give you fire safety advice. They'll also provide fire safety equipment (free of charge).

To request a visit, call 0800 05 02 999 or visit dsfire.gov.uk/homesafety.

Minute Number 7. – DCC Report.

Since I last reported to you, the Chief Executive of Devon County Council (DCC) retired at the end of August. DCC is advertising for a new Chief Executive, but in the meantime, we have an interim Chief executive. Jan Spicer, who retired last Christmas as the County solicitor, agreed to come back for 6 months. As she worked for the council for many years, she has been able to hit the ground running.

Bideford Longbridge was repaired in early October, following on from being hit by a vehicle.

I was very pleased to get the streetlights installed in Old Barnstaple Road. Unfortunately, they are, at the time of writing, still not turned on. When the contractor was installing the columns, they came across a previously unknown lead pipe. Since then, DCC has been trying to get the price for a different type of column, that does not have to be placed so deep in the ground.

Work on the "new" library continues apace. A lot of Devon's libraries are advertising as "warm rooms", including Northam. I did ask the librarian in Bideford, but she said that our library is a big old building, and not particularly warm. They are still having a coat rack for people to donate warm winter coats that folk can use, and everyone is welcome to go in out of the cold and spend time there. As well as warm rooms, other libraries are having baby weighing facilities and showing films in the evenings as part of the invitation to come and spend time in the warm. By the end of next summer, the new library will be open with far superior facilities.

I am still chasing up about the Mill Street traffic order.

I have continued to attend committee meetings and full council at County Hall. In the next few weeks, it will be time to start to set the budget for the next financial year. There have been various online Spotlight reviews on topics such as: - SEND (services for children with special educational needs and disabilities), Ambulances and Pharmacists. I was not able to make the meetings on ambulances and also pharmacists. However, I was able to input prior to the meetings and watch the recordings.

I have also been attending the Active travel meetings hosted by TDC, and the LCWIP meetings. Both of these have the aim to improve cycling and walking routes in and around Bideford. I have also attended another online meeting with our local police team wearing my councillor advocate "hat".

Stagecoach buses have a new timetable, which will be available, from the end of October. DCC wrote to Stagecoach to say that their services were not fit for purpose. Passenger numbers have not returned to pre-pandemic numbers. In addition, Stagecoach has a shortage of drivers and is actively recruiting. They lost a lot of drivers. It takes them one minute to lose a driver but 16 weeks to train a new one, during the pandemic as HGV drivers are in great demand and can earn more money elsewhere. There is going to be a public inquiry on the 27th October. At the time of writing, 24th October, this is still in the future, so I do not know the outcome. DCC had received more than 200 complaints about Stagecoach- mainly buses not turning up. Officers from DCC have met with Stagecoach and will be attending the inquiry.

Please see below a briefing from DCC which goes into a lot more detail than my original report for the meeting tonight. Councillors might like to have this as well as the report that I sent earlier, as things have changed since I wrote it.

DCC did apply to the government for nearly £100million to deliver a bus improvement plan. In the end they were only awarded £14.1million, which was nowhere near enough. The aim is to have an enhanced partnership with the operators. Currently, bus services are pulled everyday because of the shortage of drivers. This affects people trying to get to school and work and those trying to get to medical appointments. In the meantime, DCC is subsidising some of the services on the new timetable to ensure that people don't lose their bus service. My suggestion on how to spend the £14million is to have more of the electronic live bus timetables so that folk can at least know if it is worth continuing to wait at the bus stop. I also suggested Stagecoach tweak their app, so that rather than just putting a red triangle beside the bus, it takes you to a link that gives an explanation e.g., bus cancelled because of shortage of drivers, or a route change due to roadworks. Last time I tried to use a bus, they had done that. I did report that the bus timetable near the Lundy office was "dead". Apparently, it was coming to the end of its life. I have asked that it is replaced.

As you know, like Councils across the country, DCC has been hit by the cost-of-living crisis. In February we set the budget for the current financial year. By law the council must set a balanced budget. By month 2 it was evident that there were problems. The cost of everything has gone up. Highways expenses have gone up 30%, the cost of school transport has risen sharply. Many companies no longer want to do school transport and DCC has had to negotiate new contracts. We had budgeted for staff to have a 2% pay rise. The pay award is decided nationally and looks like being much higher. DCC had a black hole in the budget of £20million which was predicted to rise to £40 million by the end of the financial year. A task group was set up to look at how every department could save money and an 8-point plan has been made.

Consequently, the council has been struggling to keep everything going, let alone to expand the services, as we had hoped. Local government needs more money. This is a national issue, not confined to Devon. We need more money from central government in the Autumn budget. Our schools have no extra money. The NHS has back offices that are overstaffed while the front facing staff are understaffed. Local government must have a balanced budget and is not allowed to overspend.

During the years of austerity, DCC has already picked the low and medium hanging fruit. For example, the workforce is half what it was 10 years ago, and surplus buildings have been sold. Smarter ways of working have been introduced. Now, we are having to pick at the top branches. In the last few months, DCC has been able to save £20million e.g., every area had to cancel/postpone 10% of its planned highway works and £1 million has been saved on the A roads. Instead, Highways are prioritising safety issues. We still need to save another £20million so that we can set a realistic budget for 2023/24.

In addition, there is a massive deficit in the High needs childrens budget. Again, this is a nationwide problem. For the last few years, the government has asked councils to put the overspend on a special line in the budget- a bit like putting an i.o.u in the cash tin. The government is going to refund some of the money, but the council has been waiting since March to find out how much Devon will get. The deficit is expected to be £123million by the end of March. 76% of the council budget goes to Childrens and Adults services. e.g., specialist residential places for children with special needs and school transport costs.

Having said all that, please keep reporting safety issues to DCC. You can report things online by googling Devon County Council report a problem. A page will come

up with icons e.g., Potholes, overgrown vegetation, Street lights, road signs, flooding, empty grit bins. Click on the appropriate icon and follow the simple instructions. You will get an automated email reply with a tracking number.

Alternatively, you can telephone the Customer care service at Dcc.

Telephone 0345 155 1015

For Highways issues telephone 0345 155 1004

Out of office hours Highways EMERGENCIES only

Telephone 01392 380380
0345 155 100

Regarding flooding – the control room number is 01392 383329

Speeding or Mud/slurry on the roads is a Police matter. You can telephone or email 101. Alternatively, if you go on the Devon and Cornwall Police website, there is a Live chat option.

I am always happy for residents to contact me.

Linda.hellyer@devon.gov.uk

Telephone 07828758360

Briefing Note, November 1, 2022

Devon's Budget position

Introduction

Devon County Council provides vital services to over 800,000 people from a net revenue budget of £630 million. Devon has the largest local road network in the country and a larger proportion of older people compared to the national average. In the eleven years up to and including 2021/22 the authority's core funding from Government reduced by over £180 million or 72% in real terms. The County Council ended the 2021/22 financial year with a £3.3 million overspend, the first time this had happened in 30 years. We are not alone. New research by the County Councils Network shows 17 English authorities face a combined deficit of more than £500 million in 2023/24.

This year, next year – the mounting overspend

The uplift in funding provided by last year's Spending Review has been wiped out by rising inflation and increasing demand in Adult Social Care and Children's Services. It reflects unprecedented pressures throughout local government. The County Council – already budgeted to make £36 million of in-year savings – must somehow find a further £37 million by the end of March.

Inflation is in excess of 10% this year, reflected in ever increasing prices for supplier services and impacting on construction costs where inflation is even higher. Some 80p in every £1 the Council spends is with external suppliers. This is particularly the case with social care services which are already under huge pressures and recruitment challenges.

In 2023/24 the savings required will be £75 million. Savings on this scale mean a choice between previously unthinkable cuts to vital local services or financial failure within 12–24 months. Service cuts under serious consideration include but are not limited to:

- Widespread cuts to public transport – leaving up to 80% of Devon without a bus service
- Further reductions in road maintenance and cuts to the winter salting network
- Closure of many directly provided community services
- Withdrawal of support to external voluntary sector organisations
- Further rationing and reductions in levels of social care support

The risk of reductions to a bare minimum level of service required by law is now very real.

In addition, like many councils, we face a worrying SEND overspend in the Government's Dedicated Schools Grant driven by rising demand for special needs places and increasing cost of placements in independent schools. In a number of councils, including Devon, the Government has instructed that the deficit be placed in a special adjustment account and rolled over each year in accordance with a Statutory Override which is due to expire after this financial year.

In Devon's case, 41 children requiring additional special needs placements in independent schools since September, the start of the new academic year, means our projected overspend is currently showing a rise of over £2 million to £37.2 million which would take our accumulated deficit to £123.8 million at the end of this financial year. This is well beyond our reserves balance. If the deficit were required to come onto the Council's accounts, it would place Devon in immediate financial jeopardy.

The County Council is continuing to take action to reduce the overspend as much as possible. Our own special school capacity is planned to increase by 129 places this year which will reduce the need for more expensive independent placements. We are directing mainstream schools to provide more placements where appropriate and also exerting firm management on the Education, Health and Care Plan process to ensure quicker decision-making, improved communication with families and approving plans only where it is really necessary and in line with statutory guidance.

However, just like other councils, we do not have the money to overcome a total deficit of this scale. At the time of writing, we are awaiting a decision from Government on whether half the deficit will be met from the national Safety Valve Fund and if the County Council will be allowed to spread the cost of repaying the remainder from additional borrowing. We urgently need a decision or at least the temporary respite that Government intends to roll the deficit forward a further year.

We're asking Devon MPs to help with the following:

The Chancellor has warned all Government departments to look for further efficiency savings. If that translates into funding reductions for local government coming on top of soaring inflation it will create a perfect storm in council finances. We are supporting the County Councils Network and LGA in lobbying Government for additional funding for local government. The Leader, John Hart, is asking Devon Members of Parliament to support Devon with the following actions.

The following are four critical actions Members of Parliament could lobby for which would help protect public services to their constituents.

1. Devon needs the Autumn Statement on November 17 to ensure there is more Government financial support to councils not less, and we then need the local government financial settlement that should be announced some time before Christmas providing more core funding for Devon.
2. Devon urgently needs a decision from Government whether Devon will be assisted through the Safety Valve Programme or at least granted temporary respite via Government rolling the deficit forward a further year. Devon is already investing in improving SEND provision to ensure better value for money for our children and young people and has established greater rigor in oversight of the public purse.
3. Devon needs a delay to the charging reforms to adult social care services. Delaying the reforms but reinvesting funding earmarked for these proposals in local government would help ease the inflationary and workforce pressures facing our social care services.
4. Devon needs the Government to allocate more of the £13 billion committed to tackling the NHS backlog to the County Council so we can work with NHS partners to invest more money in preventative social care and help ease the pressure on our hospitals.

The County Council would welcome every opportunity to work collaboratively with Members of Parliament – collectively and individually – to lobby Government and ensure we can continue to deliver the services our residents – your constituents – rely on. We are happy to meet Members of Parliament virtually or in person, in Devon or in London, whichever is easier.

Briefing Note, Devon's Budget position,

November 1, 2022

County Councillor Linda Hellyer

Bideford East Division

07828758360