County Council Report- April

March has seen significant developments across Devon County Council, including children's services, rural support, infrastructure planning, public protection, and ongoing discussions on local government reform.

Children's Services and Fostering

Devon County Council continued its appeal for more foster carers this month, highlighting the need to increase local capacity for the 810 children currently in care. The Hearts and Homes Conference, held in Exeter on 20 March, offered prospective carers the opportunity to meet experienced families and understand the support available. I was so pleased to be able to attend the event. I did find it very emotional and our foster carers do such a fantastic job. Please if this is something you might be interested have a look at the website and find out more. It doesn't need to be long-term fostering, many offer fostering at weekends which is also hugely needed and valued for our children in care. Change a young person's life and consider Fostering DevonI also found out that Devon County Council are a Fostering Friendly employer and it is free for businesses to join to be able to better support foster carers who work Fostering Friendly Employers Scheme | The Fostering Network

Cost-of-Living Support: Crisis and Resilience Fund (CaRF)

The national Household Support Fund will conclude at the end of March and will be replaced by the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CaRF). Devon will receive £8.4 million per year (2026–2029) and this is a decrease from the previous years from the household support fund. The new fund moves away from blanket support, to provide targeted crisis payments, housing support via district councils, financial-resilience services, and community-based support. Devon confirms plans for new crisis support fund - North Devon Today

As Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, I stressed that large rural counties such as Devon face hidden deprivation, higher transport and fuel costs, and increased vulnerability to inflationary pressures. Torridge households, farmers and rural businesses are particularly affected by rising prices. I continue to lobby Government for long-term, sustained rural investment to ensure that no rural household is left behind.

Local Government Reorganisation Consultation

The Government's consultation on the future structure of local government in Devon closed on 26 March 2026. Devon County Council has proposed a single Devon Unitary Council, which it argues is the most financially sustainable and least disruptive model.

Alternative models submitted by other authorities include several options that would reorganise rural areas—such as Torridge—into new unitary arrangements.

We await to hear the decision by central government.

Environment, Public Health and Community Updates

DCC published multiple updates this month, including progress on nature recovery work, public health messaging around meningitis What is meningitis? Symptoms, risks and how to protect yourself - News and tick awareness, and continued enforcement activity against illegal tobacco sales.

New Livestock-Worrying Legislation and Partnership with Police

On 18 March 2026, strengthened legislation to tackle livestock worrying came into force. Devon County Council and Devon & Cornwall Police issued joint guidance urging dog owners to keep dogs on leads near livestock and to act responsibly. The new law:

- *Extends offences to include incidents on roads and public rights of way.*
- *Officially recognises alpacas and llamas as livestock.*
- *Grants police greater powers, including the ability to seize dogs, enter premises under warrant and collect forensic evidence.*

I publicly welcomed the legislation as a long-overdue step in protecting farmers and livestock, given the significant distress and financial loss such incidents cause. This is particularly important in Torridge, where public paths frequently cross grazing land and we have a lot of sheep. New laws to protect livestock backed by council and police - News

Support needed for Rural Households, farmers and Businesses

I have written to Chancellor Rachel Reeves seeking support for rural household and businesses. Not only in relation to heating oil, but LPG, red diesel, fertiliser, road fuel- all of those commodities which are seeing prices hikes due to the war in Iran and are disproportionately affecting rural areas. There are price caps on energy for all urban residents but not for us in rural areas and that's not fair- regardless of household income. As we know the chancellor has pledged some money to support heating oil costs but only for those who are "eligible". Farmers and rural communities facing 'perfect storm' as fuel costs spike - North Devon Today

Domestic Abuse Support Strategy

Devon County Council approved a new four-year Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy (2026–2030). This includes expanding refuge capacity, enhancing therapeutic support and improving access for individuals facing additional barriers. The strategy is part of Devon's wider coordinated approach to interpersonal violence and abuse. New four-year plan agreed to strengthen domestic abuse support across Devon - News