County Councillor Report- November

North Devon maternity services

The continuing suspension of births at North Devon District Hospital remains a major concern and maternity services remain suspended. More than 200 women have given birth in Exeter instead of Barnstaple and there are continuing high levels of anxiety, additional travel and disruption facing families. Assessments continue to take place every two weeks and we are lobbying everyone we can to get this reopened as a matter of urgency.

On 20th October, County Council leader, Cllr Julian Brazil - called for a public guarantee that the maternity unit would reopen and remain open, following national suggestions that smaller units should be closed.

We remain concerned about why enhanced recruitment incentives were introduced so late, how women's choices are being respected, and the withdrawal of home births alongside hospital births.

North Devon's maternity crisis takes to Parliament (again)

Road repairs and drainage

There was welcome news on 14th October when Cabinet approved an additional £4.5 million for highway maintenance and resilience. The package will strengthen important diversion routes, expand the Rapid Response Teams and provide four additional dedicated drainage teams. It follows the extra £3 million for reactive maintenance and £4 million for rapid-response repairs announced earlier this year.

The rapid-response work is particularly useful for damaged stretches that cause real difficulties but do not meet the criteria for an immediate safety repair. The additional drainage teams will tackle blocked gullies, channels and pipes, with councillors and highways officers helping identify priorities. Parish councils' knowledge of recurring trouble spots will be very valuable here. Please keep sending me locations where drainage repeatedly fails or where deteriorating roads need a more substantial response than an individual pothole repair (I know there are a lot).

I'm also please that Parish Councils are starting to sign up to the road warden scheme and volunteers are coming forward for the 1 day training which is funded by Devon County Council. This will allow more small scale highways work to take place- repairing those small annoying potholes before they get big enough to do damage, cleaning signs etc which can take place alongside other volunteers as long as there is a trained road warden present. I know this will make a huge difference where eit is happening locally. Our neighbours in Chulmleigh Division are showing that this can be a real success.

Road Warden Scheme - Devon Highways

Local Government Reorganisation

The pause in Local Government Reorganisation continues to leave Devon in limbo. On 14th October, the County Council reported that approximately £2.1 million had already been spent in connection with the process and that full implementation could cost an estimated £100

million. Cabinet wrote to the Government and asked for those costs to be fully reimbursed; we are yet to hear back.

The Council also reported that it had applied for a judicial review to protect its position if the original proposals were brought back.

Devon politicians vow to fight delayed council overhaul

Opportunities for young people

On 14th October, Cabinet backed the recommendations of the annual public health report on young people. These include developing a Devon Youth Matters Strategic Plan, improving mental health support and employment opportunities, and creating a digital youth service to reach more rural and coastal communities. The report identifies transport costs and availability as the main barrier to young people taking up opportunities.

Make Your Mark: the voting is underway for Devon's young people: what matters most? Please ask young people aged 11-18 to vote here: Make Your Mark - Children, families and education

Youth grants are also still available: PLACES TO GO THINGS TO DO Grant Fund - for Young People - Communities

Libraries and new community grants

From 1st October, overdue book fines were removed for all users of Devon's libraries, and existing overdue charges were cleared. Loan periods still apply, and charges for reservations and lost books remain.

Two new library grant programmes also opened in October. The £200,000 Re-imagined Library Spaces Fund offers grants of up to £20,000 for improvements to library buildings and related community spaces. First-round expressions of interest close on 15th December, with a second round planned for January 2027. Re-imagined Library Spaces Fund - Communities

The £100,000 Enhanced Library Offers Fund provides grants of up to £1,000 for activities and events that bring people into libraries and improve inclusion. It has no expression-of-interest stage or fixed closing date. Funding from both programmes must be spent by Christmas 2027. Town and parish councils, charities and community organisations are among those invited to apply. Enhanced Library Offers Grant Fund - Communities

These are useful opportunities for parish councils and local groups to explore with their library, particularly where a modest improvement or regular activity could help reduce isolation and widen access.

Supporting Devon farmers

I have been calling for support for farmers- from Bluetongue to SFI, to the farming budget. I am yet to believe we are being listened to but I will keep putting the pressure on government. It's madness that we are being encouraged to stockpile food yet we are not concerned about food security in our own country.

On a county level I am pleased to report positive work. Devon County Council has agreed to reinstate the Rural Support and Wellbeing Programme – particularly recognising the pressures

and devastation as a result of the bluetongue crisis. This is a welcome step but the reality is that we need to be better supported by central government: Cabinet backs renewed support for Devon farmers hit by bluetongue - News

Community funding

The Growing Communities Fund remains a useful source of support for local projects addressing hardship, isolation and wellbeing. Grants are typically £500 to £1,000, and parish and town councils can apply where the activity benefits the community and does not replace statutory provision. The published deadline is January 2027, or earlier if funding is fully committed. Growing Communities Fund - Devon Funding News

For residents facing a sudden financial crisis, the Crisis and Resilience Fund is available through district councils. It can include support for eligible low-income households struggling with essential costs, including heating oil. This is existing support that may be especially relevant as winter approaches. Crisis and Resilience Fund and Heating Oil Support | Torridge District Council

“Progress for fools”

These are the lyrics in a song about the proposals for the hyperscale data centre and battery storage in Great Torrington.

The campaign continues and there are an army of experts working behind the scenes, gathering information, becoming fully armed to fight and win the battle of Torrington for us.

We are getting more young people involved which is so important as it is their future. The community is coming forward, only from the town but from further afield showing this is not NIMBYism but there is a real recognition that to build and industrialise here on this monstrous scale is a real crime against our beautiful environment. I encourage everyone to get involved and informed and to do what they can to fight this.

Girl, 9, fights plans for Europe’s largest data centre costing £13billion