

## **NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL: 21 JULY 2021**

### **LEADER'S REPORT**

You will be aware that the government has introduced the system whereby Councils have to bid for money for projects when funding becomes available. Two major funds were announced in the Budget; the Community Renewal Fund and the Levelling Up Fund. Although North Devon hasn't been identified as being a priority area I would like to thank the team who prepared projects for each. They have worked extremely hard to prepare funding bids within a very limited timescale.

For the Community Renewal Fund the team worked on a project to match people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with employers for paid work placements. The proposal included a package of support aimed at ensuring that the individual succeeds at the placement which becomes a stepping stone to a permanent role. However, bids from organisations in Devon needed to go through Devon County Council who unfortunately didn't submit our bid to government but chose others from the large number put forward.

However, our bid for the Levelling Up fund we were able to submit direct to government. It is focussed around Ilfracombe and looks to implement much of the Seafront Masterplan that has been talked about for some time as well as improvements to the Landmark theatre. The seafront masterplan improvements would help to make the seafront area more attractive while providing better public amenities including enhanced play facilities, wayfinding and a new and more accessible path to top of Capstone Hill. This will further encourage tourism in the town and promote its sustainability. This would also be enhanced by an improved theatre that would strengthen Ilfracombe's hospitality industry and lead to all year-round economic benefits. Whether we will be successful time will tell but even if we are not we will have projects ready to go when further funds become available.

Since the last Full Council we have welcomed Donna Sibley who has joined Torrridge and North Devon Council as a climate change officer. Working together with Torrridge will hopefully enable both councils to make more strides towards becoming carbon neutral and in raising awareness of the climate emergency.

Another important addition to our council team is Maria Bailey who started with us on 21<sup>st</sup> June as Planning Development Manager. Maria is very experienced both in local government and from running her own planning practice and is a welcome addition to our planning team.

As you know, along with Torrridge, we have begun a revision of the joint local plan and Councillor Malcolm Prowse is chairing the committee which is taking this forward. The

proposed adoption date of revised Local Plan is December 2023 (in line with what the government suggests) but this is an extremely challenging timescale for a comprehensive Plan Review and is probably not feasible particularly as the government is currently looking at making major alterations to the planning system. We do need to grapple with the problem of having a five year land supply or we will be facing many more planning applications which do not conform to our local plan. This is particularly the case as we have turned down the application at Yelland and decided not to sell Westacott Park. This, for example, presents the Council with the challenge of the wider sustainable development of the BAR 01 allocation.

I would like to express my thanks to all those who have helped ensure that there was a budget surplus last financial year. It has been a real team effort which meant that at March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021 there was a budget surplus of £593,000. This has enabled funds to be put in the Covid budget management reserve which gives us added financial protection as government support is phased out. The Economic Development reserve will also benefit and will give us greater capacity for future regeneration projects. Some is being allocated to our general fund reserve but I am particularly pleased that £50,000 has been given to an environmental initiatives reserve which will help the climate action group to fund their future projects.

Thanks to our comms team who continue to encourage residents to, for example, 'buy local' and 'wave goodbye to single use plastics' and continue to keep us informed about the Covid pandemic. The significant rise in cases in Devon is a real concern and where possible most of our staff continue to work from home. If all restrictions are removed on July 19<sup>th</sup> there are likely to be real challenges for us if members of our workforce get infected with the virus e.g. with the waste and recycling collections. Also we will need to decide if the social distancing rule is removed if we are happy to resume meeting face to face as a Full Council at Brynsworthy.

As you will realise the demand for local people for housing is increasing. The homeless demand continues to be an ongoing concern; in the 12-week period to week ending 17/06/21, 349 homelessness approaches were made, averaging 29 per week. The team is doing well regarding homelessness prevention, but the number of households in temporary accommodation is currently around 40. Fortunately we have been awarded £347,000 from the rough sleeper initiative for year 21/22. On average there are 10 – 15 new applications per day to Devon Home Choice, currently 2273 in North Devon are registered and an additional 487 await further information from applicants or are applications to be assessed.

It is good news that we have been awarded an additional £500,000, from the Better Care Fund. The total award for 21/22 will be approximately £1.6m. This will be a significant programme to deliver and the benefits for residents will be immediate. The most common form of assistance is the provision of stairlifts (average cost £3,000) and

bathroom adaptations (e.g., removal of a bath and toilet and installing a level access shower and accessible toilet on average costs £5,500).

The Council is also involved in the Care Leavers Initiative. Dissatisfied with the housing support and stability being provided, we have with our partners in Devon County Council and North Devon Homes, developed a new way to accommodate and support young people leaving care. The availability of suitable housing is a key issue for care leavers as they move to independent living. For some, the failings of the previous system was resulting in multiple evictions, increased risk of drug and alcohol use and interaction with the criminal justice system. Hopefully this initiative will transform the lives of young people who have experienced multiple disadvantages.

Finally I am really concerned that our North Devon secondary schools have had no school nurse service for the past two years. I propose to write as leader of our council to the Devon County Council asking for this provision to be reinstated for September and to urge that they use, transparently, the cost savings that will have resulted from this two year gap to give the schools the hours of clinical help to our children that they did not get.

David Worden 10<sup>th</sup> July 2021.