

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 6 APRIL 2022

Leader's Report

The news has been dominated in recent weeks with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and horrors associated with the war. It is heart breaking to see day after day pictures of destruction and hear that civilians have been targeted. Millions of refugees have already been created with Poland, Hungary, Moldova, Slovakia, Rumania and other neighbouring countries having more and more desperate people flooding into their lands. You may have noticed that we have been flying a joint UK/Ukrainian flag to show our support for the people of Ukraine. There has been a real groundswell of support from individuals and groups within North Devon and Sarah Bentley is coordinating our Council's response regarding the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This enables local sponsors to match with guests from Ukraine. This initial phase of the scheme is designed to supplement the Ukraine Family Visa for people in the UK to now support friends and colleagues. In addition, we have seen matches of guests and sponsors, often through third-party organisations supporting those fleeing the conflict. We are now seeing several hundred people in Devon being matched and, following permission to travel, we will start to see those families arrive in Devon. The situation is evolving rapidly, with updated guidance coming through from government daily. All Team Devon partners are working together to develop a rapid response.

In North Devon we are in communication with the Pickwell Foundation and Sunrise, health, DWP and schools. Sarah Bentley reminded us in her recent communication of 'the significant risks and issues, including the potential future break up of arrangements between guests/sponsors, and with it the need to find emergency accommodation solutions. We are working through related contingencies to try and avoid the need to provide temporary accommodation.'

We will want to ensure that the goodwill and positive support can be utilised by guests, sponsors and partners in a safe way and where appropriate to give guests consistent opportunities to settle and feel welcome. We will work with partners to map out an approach in which sponsors, guests, communities and organisations can access responses particularly to sign-post to key support and services.

The war is having quite an impact on our residents and us as a Council. Many families will be struggling as tax increases, fuel and energy prices and inflation which were already rising and the invasion has made this pressure on finances much worse. We too are facing considerable increases in the cost of fuel for our waste and recycling lorries and demand for our services is likely to increase.

In the Levelling Up White Paper, the UK Government set a mission that, by 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal, with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution, with a simplified, long-term funding settlement. Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Devolution Deal Partners would like to agree and implement a deal from 1 April 2023. Devon, Plymouth and Torbay are seeking to agree a deal at Level 2. This is considered to be the best devolution model to adopt for a large functional economic area with a diverse mix of urban, rural and coastal communities and a varied geographical, political and governance make-up. The negotiation team will be pushing for a number of those functions that are currently limited to Level 3 to be included within our deal even though we are not suggesting having an elected mayor. How all this will pan out I don't know but it is important that northern Devon is not neglected in any potential deal so getting right the governance of a future combined authority is vitally important.

I would encourage everyone to consider participating in the consultations which are now taking place concerning the review of the Local Plan. The project entitled 'People and Place' will shape northern Devon over the next twenty or more years so it is really important that we make the right choices. This joint venture between Torridge and North Devon Councils and will be looking at many issues such as housing, the environment, sustainability, jobs, access to transport and health and well being.

Please make people aware that the current consultations end on Friday 29th April. Information on these consultations, plus the timetable for the wider project, can be found on the People and Place hub, which can be accessed via the websites for : [North Devon Council](#) or [Torridge District Council](#).

I am delighted that North Devon Council's Planning Service was ranked the second highest performing authority in the South West in the recent government performance tables. The ratings were based on the number of applications processed between 1 October and 31 December last year within the agreed time.

The prospectus for the second round of the leveling up fund has now been published. It can be seen at [Levelling-up-fund-round-2-prospectus](#). I am extremely disappointed that North Devon is still in category 3, the lowest priority.

The members mid-term training has had seen some excellent sessions and I would like to take the opportunity of thanking all those involved. However, the attendance at some has been a little disappointing.

On a positive note I would like to thank Sarah Jane Mackenzie-Shapland and her team for all the hard work they are doing regarding the Future High Street plans for Barnstaple and for the feedback members have been receiving. Also I am very much looking forward to the opening of the new North Devon Leisure Centre which will soon be upon us and the Ilfracombe Water Sports Centre is now well under way.

Despite the challenges of Covid, I believe that as a Council we are in a good position moving forward.

David Worden

April 2022.