

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 20 JULY 2022

LEADER'S REPORT

Since my last report to Council a great deal has happened as the cost of living has rocketed. A major concern for the Council is the effect of inflation, energy and fuel rises on our budget plus the staff salary increases. The pay claim 2022-23 has now been received from the Unions and they have requested for a minimum of £2,000 on each pay scale point or RPI inflation (11.1% in April 2022), whichever is the highest outcome. With approximately 440 FTE staff, even the lowest costing of the above claim would cost the Council an additional £900,000 in 2022-23 and this cost is then an ongoing impact within the base budget for the following years. Bearing all this in mind the role of the cross party working group to look at the budget for next year is particularly important. We were already looking at a potential budget gap of £2,000,000. In addition to the cost pressures above we are being stung for some of the costs for the Yelland planning appeal. This is likely to be a considerable amount. This is really frustrating as we managed to make over £600,000 in savings in the budget for 2021 – 22, a really good news story and that would have helped considerably towards the projected budget gap for next year.

On a positive note, the aims of North Devon Council is to do everything it can to enhance the quality of life for our residents. This has been evident with the recent opening of the new North Devon (Tarka) Leisure Centre in Barnstaple which is a fabulous facility for our area and the Water Sports Centre is well on its way in Ilfracombe. In addition the purchase of Green Lanes and the Future High Street redevelopment of Barnstaple shows the Council's commitment to improving the experience of shoppers. Thank you for those who attended the opening by Eddie 'the Eagle' Edmunds of the Leisure Centre and if you haven't had a look around I would encourage you to do so as soon as you are able. Particular thanks need to go to the core team of Mark Kentell, Richard Slaney, Lucy Wheeler and Simon Fuller who have been focused on the project. They, and everyone involved, should be very proud of their achievement. At a time when many councils are cutting back on leisure provision and at a time, during the pandemic, when the very existence of leisure centres came under real threat, North Devon has a brand new facility of which to be proud.

These achievements have all been very evident in the press and public eye but perhaps under the radar has been the development of a cultural strategy for Northern Devon. North Devon is fortunate in having the Queens Theatre in Barnstaple and the Landmark theatre in Ilfracombe and we have excellent museums plus a wealth of artistic talents and choirs. Alongside large successful commercial festivals like OceanFest and respected arts festivals like Barnstaple's Theatrefest we have had local celebrations like the Hunting of the Earl of Rone in Combe Martin, the Pilton Green Man Festival and the Deep Roots Festival in South Molton. I am delighted that the Strategy & Resources Committee endorsed the creation of a Northern Devon Cultural Partnership to work in close partnership with Arts Council England to ensure that there is a clear delivery plan for the Cultural strategy. 'Flourishing Culture' is certainly ambitious as it includes 'Our region's creativity, rooted in our identity, heritage and environment, will be as breathtaking as our beaches, wild like our seas and as divergent as our landscapes... The expressions of our culture will be reflective of all that live here, honouring our past traditions, whilst creating a platform for our dreams of the future. It will be a place where creativity

thrives, where all voices are heard and where communities use culture as a vehicle for change and action.'

With what is happening in Government at the moment the Devon devolution deal progress is very slow. Government ministers seemed to be concentrating on the authorities which are going for Tier 3 and the mayoral system but no doubt we will hear more in the autumn after the summer recess.

We are conscious that more resources are needed in the planning department and Jeremy Mann is working to achieve this. I hope that soon we will have some positive news about a replacement for Maria Bailey.

You will be aware that we have had some damage done at the Crematorium which is extremely disappointing.

We are in the process of drawing up a bid for the UK Prosperity Fund. It is a very quick turn around as we have to get the plan in by August 1st. It was discussed at the North Devon Futures Meeting recently and we are working with Torridge on this as well. The fund is supposed to replace European funding following Brexit and we will receive £1.2 million over three years with the majority coming in the third year.

David Worden
Leader of the Council