

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 28 SEPTEMBER 2022

LEADER'S REPORT

The events since the last Full Council meeting have been overshadowed by the passing of our Queen and the accession to the throne of King Charles III. The amazing scenes of thousands queuing for hours to pass Her Majesty's coffin and the thousands of flowers laid in Green Park demonstrated the great affection with which she was held by millions of her subjects. Her selfless service, grace and faith has been an inspiration to so many throughout the world. Many were touched by the speech which King Charles III gave as he addressed the nation and it was a privilege to represent North Devon, along with Councillor Julie Hunt and Jon Triggs, at the Devon Proclamation of his accession at County Hall. Thank you to the many councillors who attended the Barnstaple Proclamation the following day and to our chair of Council, Councillor Julie Hunt, who read the proclamation after Lady Arran had given an introduction explaining some of its history and importance. After the mayor of Barnstaple, Councillor Louisa York had spoken, it was an honour to lead the prayers and many have attended similar events and services throughout North Devon. We have all seen history in the making.

Since the last Full Council meeting it has been pleasing to see the recent report on policing which stated that Devon and Cornwall is now the second safest place in the country in which to live and we are indeed fortunate that the crime rate in North Devon is low. However, we all know that there are areas where there is room for improvement and one of those is in tackling antisocial behaviour. The actions of a few people can spoil a town or village centre and in particular its night time economy as news travels fast when there is an incident that causes people to feel unsafe. Our officers have been working hard to stamp out antisocial behaviour in our communities because we want everyone to feel safe at all times. This good work has been recognised and more than £500,000 of resources secured to tackle antisocial behaviour and violence in Barnstaple.

This will consist of £348,632 from the fourth round of the Safer Streets fund, with £179,126 of match (additional) funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and North Devon Council. I am delighted that this will enable a series of projects to take place designed to make Barnstaple safer for everyone. It will involve creating a new street marshall team and extra specialist staff will be employed to work with those who potentially cause antisocial behaviour. In addition training on how to keep safe will be given to school children and also those who work in the hospitality industry. These education programmes will hopefully help to change negative attitudes and behaviours where they exist. Other measures will include improving street lighting, providing more CCTV cameras and coverage plus the removal of graffiti if it appears. Our aim is to create a real pride in our towns which will back up the good work done by our waste and recycling work force, litter picking teams and our in Bloom groups which help to brighten up our urban areas with glorious colour.

Our waste and recycling team were at full stretch this summer and reluctantly we took the decision to cancel garden waste collections for two weeks at the beginning of the month to allow crews to catch up. The summer holidays are always extremely busy for our recycling teams and this has been made worse by the national shortage of HGV drivers. Speaking with the other District Council leaders recently it is clear that all the District Councils in Devon have been struggling with their waste and recycling services and also a shortage of planners. By the time you read this I hope that Tracey

Blackmore, our new Development Manager has arrived in our planning department but please be aware that our planners have many cases on their books at present.

The Housing department is also very busy as more people are presenting themselves as homeless or potentially homeless as the number of permanent rental properties shrinks. We have done an excellent piece of work regarding holiday lets and second homes which we are using to respond to the government's call for evidence. It will form an important part of the Devon wide response to the Department for Culture Media and Sport.

We received some good news in the summer to say that North Devon Council has been granted £1,162,792 by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as a result of a funding bid by its Housing, Vulnerable Persons and Community team. The Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding will be used to pay for rough sleeper services in conjunction with local partners for the period 2022-25. The council will be working with Devon Partnership Trust, Together Drug and Alcohol Service, Royal Devon University Healthcare Trust, Barnstaple Alliance, Freedom Community Alliance, Encompass Southwest and M5 Security to continue providing a number of services,

Thank you to those who attended the finance workshop. We are currently waiting to see the outcome of the pay negotiations for staff. As you are aware, like most other local authorities, we budgeted for a 2% increase in wages but this is going to be greatly exceeded and with the other inflationary cost pressures we are facing some tough decisions in the next few months leading up to setting our budget for the next financial year. The challenge that is coming towards us is something that is unique and not one that we have dealt with previously and I hope that we can work cross party on this issue.

It is disappointing to hear of outbreaks of avian influenza or bird flu in our area. If you find a dead wild bird you should report them to Defra by calling the helpline (03459 33 55 77) please do not touch or pick up any dead or visibly sick birds that you find. Further information can be found on gov.uk or North Devon Councils Website.

The rules which came into force on the 31st August means that all bird keepers in the region must implement enhanced biosecurity measures to help protect their flock. I really do hope that these preventive measures will be effective and stop the death of thousands of wild birds and prevent the culling of domestic poultry. I am reassured that the risk to the general public's health is very low and properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.

Some good news to finish. I am delighted that we retained the Green Flag Award status for Yeo Valley Woodland and Bicclescombe Park. 2022 is the 18th consecutive year that Bicclescombe Park has achieved Green Flag status, with Yeo Valley Woodland receiving the award for the 11th time in a row. Both spaces are owned and managed by North Devon Council, with the help of active community groups including the Friends of Yeo Valley Woodland and the Bicclescombe Park User Group.

David Worden
Leader of the Council