

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 19 JULY 2023

LEADER'S REPORT

In my inaugural Leader's report, I have been actively engaged in various commitments across Northern Devon. On behalf of North Devon Council, I had the privilege of welcoming numerous businesses to the Marine Futures Event held at Petroc. This important event, which took place on Thursday, 22 June, saw the University Centre at Petroc hosting approximately three hundred businesses, stakeholders, and members of the local community at the South West Institute of Technology (SWIoT). Collaborating with North Devon Council and Torridge District Council, Petroc aimed to inform and involve local businesses, schools, teachers, students, and parents regarding the promising opportunities emerging in areas like Floating Offshore Wind (FLOW), green hydrogen, and aquaculture.

The morning session featured a business conference with notable speakers from the Crown Estate, Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult (ORE), local business TCi, and the National Composites Centre. These speakers provided insights into the upcoming "green and marine" developments in and around the Celtic Sea and emphasised the significance of local businesses in the supply chain. They also highlighted the need for a skilled local workforce and encouraged individuals to pursue local education and career growth to fully capitalise on these developments.

During the afternoon, the focus shifted to engaging schools and teachers, offering industry stands and interactive workshops. The workshops included immersive experiences such as exploring a virtual reality (VR) wind farm and the opportunity to build and test floating wind turbine models in a wave tank provided by the University of Plymouth SuperGen project. Seiche Ltd and AutoNaut organised a session on underwater acoustics, showcasing a real-life-sized boat and models for attendees to explore. Other activities included the SS Freshspring exhibit and a workshop on the logistics of establishing a wind farm, providing schoolchildren and college students with hands-on experiences.

In the evening, the workshops extended their reach to the wider community, inviting parents and students to participate. Attendees had the opportunity to listen to speakers discussing the new Appledore Clean Maritime Innovation Centre, explore the role of technology in climate change awareness, gain insights into working in FLOW, and learn about the local courses and qualifications available to support exciting new careers in the marine and maritime sectors.

I have just returned from the LGA Conference in Bournemouth. I particularly found the Innovation Zone within the conference a dynamic and creative space where councils had the opportunity to present new ideas and solutions to the major challenges confronting local government.

The theme for this year's Innovation Zone was "Challenge and Change." The sessions held in the Innovation Zone were interactive, providing opportunities for questions and discussions. I found the topics of interest were addressing the cost of living crisis, climate change, achieving net zero, developing and upskilling local government workforce, fostering economic growth and supporting communities. Housing emerged as a prominent focal point during the conference, given that it remains a significant challenge for the majority of councils across the country.

I have embarked on a series of visits to numerous towns and villages throughout North Devon, with my most recent stop being in Ilfracombe. During my visit, I had the pleasure of meeting with local businesses, voluntary organisations, and town councillors. One individual who stood out was Carol Parkin, the Director and Centre Manager of Belle's Place, who tirelessly dedicates her time to making a positive impact in the local community of Ilfracombe. Belle's Place is a centre that provides a wide range of activities and support services to the community. One of the notable services they offer is providing free breakfasts to individuals experiencing homelessness and those facing challenges related to the cost of living crisis. Additionally, they provide valuable information and resources on drug and alcohol issues, sexual health specifically tailored for young people, and operate a needle exchange service.

Recognising the financial difficulties some residents face in purchasing school uniforms, Belle's Place also facilitates access to donated, pre-used uniforms. This initiative ensures that struggling families can obtain appropriate school attire for their children without additional financial burden.

By offering these activities and services, Belle's Place plays a vital role in supporting the local community, addressing pressing needs, and creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for all residents.

During discussions with the town councillors, I gained valuable insights into various issues and opportunities that exist within the town. As a result, I have made a commitment to increase the frequency of my visits to Ilfracombe, enabling us to collaborate more closely on a range of projects. By working together, we aim to harness these opportunities and address the challenges faced by the town, ensuring its continued growth and development.

I have been actively engaging with various Heads of Service to receive comprehensive briefings on their work plans. Through these meetings, I have been consistently impressed by the dedication and commitment exhibited by our workforce. It is evident that they are deeply invested in providing a high-quality service to our residents.

The passion and enthusiasm displayed by our team members reinforce the importance of delivering excellent services that meet the needs of our community. I am grateful for their efforts and look forward to collaborating closely with them to further enhance the services we offer and ensure the well-being and satisfaction of our residents.

Finally in the medium term, North Devon Council is confronted with two significant challenges. Firstly, there is the current impact from inflationary pressures regarding our

financial resources and the need to carefully manage them. Secondly, the uncertainty surrounding the future allocation of funds from central government adds another layer of complexity to our financial planning.

Addressing these challenges requires diligent financial management, exploring alternative funding sources, and adopting strategies to mitigate the potential impact of uncertain financial support. By proactively addressing these issues, we aim to ensure the continued provision of essential services to the residents of North Devon while navigating the evolving financial landscape.

Councillor Ian Roome

July 2023