

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 17 JANUARY 2024

LEADER'S REPORT

Happy New Year to everyone and I hope you all had a fabulous break with family and friends.

Great news that I was able to report to the recent Strategy and Resources committee that I have instructed council officers to draw up plans to open the waiting area at Barnstaple Bus Station to include providing a relocated toilet and the provision for a commercial café venture. The committee all agreed to proceed with this plan which will benefit all passengers who use the bus station. I have kept the Town Clerk of Barnstaple Town Council informed as they will still look at future uses including a community hub if funding opportunities come forward.

The North Devon Community Lottery is set to launch soon, with 50% of ticket proceeds going to charities, voluntary organisations and other not-for-profit groups, and the remainder being put towards prizes and operating costs

Organisations and good causes interested in taking part can attend the launch event at Barnstaple Library on Wednesday, 24 January 2024, where they can find out more about fundraising through the lottery. The event, which starts at 2.30pm, has been organised in partnership with North Devon Voluntary Services. Following the event, tickets for North Devon Community Lottery will go on sale on 20 February 2024.

North Devon Council has appointed leading lottery management company Gatherwell to operate the lottery. Gatherwell have successfully launched similar lotteries throughout the UK, including in Exeter, North Somerset and Teignbridge.

I am pleased that Tarka Leisure Centre's pool facilities have been recognised with a national award. The leisure centre was a winner at the UK Pool and Spa Awards 2023 in the Commercial Pool Project Of The Year category. The leisure centre at Seven Brethren in Barnstaple was also shortlisted for the Outstanding Technical Design award, while the leisure centre's operator, Lex Leisure, was shortlisted in the Operator of the Year category.

The UK Pool and Spa Awards ceremony was held in Birmingham on Thursday, 7 December.

Tarka Leisure Centre opened in June 2022, with pool facilities including a 25m eight-lane competition swimming pool and a 20m four-lane learner pool. Away from the pool there's a sports hall with four badminton courts, a large gym, multi-purpose exercise studios and Devon's first endless ski slope. The £15m centre was constructed by Speller Metcalfe.

I am pleased to report that North Devon Council and Torrington District Council have jointly published a report that re-affirms the councils can show a sufficient supply of

land for housing to meet the target for the next five years. The report on the so-called five-year housing land supply, published on 30 November, shows the councils can demonstrate a housing land supply equivalent to 5.18 years.

Demonstrating a housing land supply is important because if councils are unable to do so, they are required to look more favourably on housing proposals that would not usually be considered appropriate. This can often result in the grant of planning permission for housing in locations that were not expected to see development through the plan for the area's future.

The five-year housing land supply for northern Devon was re-established in April after a period of three years where it was not possible to demonstrate it. The importance of this was shown in September when North Devon Council was able to successfully defend the refusal of 161 homes in Fremington at appeal, with the Planning Inspectorate agreeing the councils could demonstrate a sufficient land supply for housing.

This latest report brings the information on the housing supply up-to-date and incorporates lessons learned from defending the recent appeal. Continuing to demonstrate a sufficient supply means the councils can look to support proposals that contribute towards the long-term vision for northern Devon and the plan for the area's future, whilst being able to deflect other proposals that fail to do so.

The provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 was announced on 18 December 2023 and nationally the settlement is an increased Core Spending Power for Local Government of 6.5% across England, this includes Council Tax and differs for each Local Authority. For North Devon, our increased Core Spending Power from 2023/24 to 2024/25 is shown as 4.7%.

The finance team are working through the impact the settlement has on our overall funding and pulling together the detailed budget papers for consideration by Members at the February Full Council meeting. There is a national consultation on the provisional settlement which runs to 15 January 2024 and North Devon Council will be submitting a detailed response to push for a fairer funding settlement that recognises the challenges rural authorities face compared to urban areas and also the increased inflationary cost pressures local Councils have been experiencing. A copy of the consultation response will be provided to Members alongside the draft budget papers that you will consider next month.

Councillor Ian Roome

January 2024