

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 25 SEPTEMBER 2024

LEADER'S REPORT

Councillor Pete Leaver and myself attended the Ilfracombe Town Council meeting in July where we discussed a number of issues which are currently being addressed / looked into. Examples covered things such as grass cutting on Capstone, general appearance of the town, housing problems and car parks. We both intend to get round other parishes and towns in North Devon to conduct similar exercises.

I have attended various meetings with other District Council Leaders across Devon and one of the main issues has been the crisis in the housing sector. Both here in North Devon and across the region as a whole – district councils have been pushing the need to use the extra money raised in doubling the Council tax on 2nd homes to help alleviate the housing needs across Devon. It has been very disappointing therefore that the Conservative controlled Devon County Council will not commit to this. The extra money raised should not be going into the general coffers of Devon County Council to help them with their own financial mismanagement. The decision to double the council tax on 2nd homes was made specifically to help with the housing crisis and this is where the money should go. To use it for other purposes is wrong.

As members will be aware, prior to the election, a devolution deal had been negotiated between Devon County Council, Torbay and government under legislation that allowed for the creation of County Combines Authorities. Full Council considered that deal and raised a number of concerns, one of which was the fact that District Councils were not given voting rights. The secondary legislation required to bring the deal into being did not go through Parliament before the election and so the position is now a little uncertain.

Whilst discussions are still ongoing between the two unitary authorities and government, government ministers have informally signalled their support for greater involvement of District Councils. As a result, Devon District Councils recently wrote to all Devon MPs asking them to support the principle of a new deal which would be more ambitious and would involve District Councils in the governance and decision making. Nationally, other District Councils in areas where there were suggested or agreed County Combined Authority deals are making similar approaches to government and MPs.

District Councils in Devon do still want to work collaboratively with the unitary authorities to achieve the best deal for the area. As soon as there is more certainty, I will let everyone know.

It was a shame that the Joint Local Plan Visioning workshop was postponed by TDC and whilst I disagree that there was a need to do this, I do see that it is vital that if we are going to carry out a Joint Local Plan, it is important that both authorities are comfortable and that both sets of members have the opportunity to have input. At

the time of writing, a new date is being organised for the Workshop which I hope as many councillors as possible are able to attend. The Local Plan preparation has been hit by the uncertainty created after the election. Legislation dealing with how a Local plan is prepared was passed before the election and we are currently waiting to see when those new requirements and timelines will be introduced. Currently, it looks as if we will not be able to formally start preparation until Autumn 2025. In the meantime, we do still have an up to date local plan which we will continue to use and we will use the recent consultation on the NPPF to formally express concern about that delay.

Lead Members are now meeting on a more regular monthly meeting – after each Strategy and Resources meeting. This will lead to Lead Members giving a report on their respective portfolios on a basis of two at each Full Council – this will start at the next Full Council meeting in November.

It was proposed back in July that a Working Party be set up to look into the situation of Car Parks throughout North Devon. At the time of writing this has yet to be set up as we are waiting on members from the Conservative and Independent groups to put their names forward.

Councillor Clayton

Leader of the Council