

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 15 JANUARY 2025

LEADER'S REPORT

The Government published the Devolution White Paper in December 2024 and there have been many meetings to discuss the implications of what will happen to the future of Local Government across Devon in general and in particular here in North Devon. It is a fast moving environment and as I write this the District Council leaders across Devon have just met and agreed a joint statement on our position. Essentially this argues against the Devon County Council Leaders request to approach Central Government to postpone the 2025 County elections in order to facilitate a single Devon Unitary Authority. Devon County Council are meeting to discuss this at a Special Meeting on the 9th January and of course we have arranged a Special Full Council for later on the same day. District Leaders are also compiling a letter to be sent to the Minister in regard to our position.

As well as making preparations for the future of Local Government in Devon – here in north Devon we are making arrangements for our Corporate Peer Challenge [peer review] which has been commissioned by the LGA. This will involve a peer team of senior officers and members from similar authorities who will be visiting North Devon to learn about our Council and provide us with some helpful recommendations. They will be looking at various areas but it is worth pointing out that this is not a formal inspection – it is more of an opportunity to be reflective - with others – on what we are doing well. It will also give us the chance to reflect on where we could be doing things better and then make the necessary improvements. Our approach - both from officers and members – should therefore be positive, open and transparent. The review will be made up of two visits. The first [4-5 February 2025] will focus on our overview and scrutiny arrangements. The second [18th-21st March 2025] and main visit will look at areas covering priorities and outcomes, organisational structures, financial management and capacity for improvement. I would like to thank Kit Ayers [our management trainee] for helping to facilitate and plan all the people / tasks involved.

Councillor Pete Leaver and myself have continued with our policy of trying to increase and build upon our contact with parishes in the District of North Devon. We met with Landkey Parish at the beginning of December and heard of various issues affecting the area. We were due to meet with Swimbridge parish on the 9th January but this had to be postponed due to our Special Full Council. In my absence Councillor Pete leaver chaired a meeting of the parish Forum at the end of November where a number of issues were discussed. We have also arranged a Parish Forum on Wednesday 12th March regarding Emergency Planning.

At the December meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee we had an informative update on the Landmark Theatres. It has been a challenging time for the sector but Council officers have been meeting with their management on a monthly basis and received quarterly monitoring reports. Works have recently been completed to the Queens Theatre roof and Landmark Theatre fire alarm system.

They have also submitted funding bids to upgrade the heating system at the Landmark. The committee has also been receiving regular updates from the Head of Environmental Enhancement. The new baler kit was due to arrive just before Christmas and there will be specialist contractors arriving to assemble the equipment this month [Jan 2025.]

Councillor David Clayton
Leader of North Devon Council