

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL
COUNCIL 20TH NOVEMBER 2019
LEADER'S REPORT

Since the last full council meeting Ken Miles and I have held a series of meetings in order to speak to all our staff. We have been able to inform them of the council's priorities and corporate plan and to give all staff the opportunity of expressing to us their concerns or ideas about how we can improve our services. I have also spent a morning with the customer service team listening to what residents are phoning in about. I was extremely impressed with the way our customer service team responded to all those who were contacting our council that day.

It was also pleasing to see on Inside Out (BBC1) on Monday 28th October North Devon Council being praised as a good example for other Councils to copy. This was a feature concerning providing accommodation for those who are homeless. We have put in a submission for a national award for the housing initiative of the year. Basically this is about transformational change which has been undertaken by our staff to improve the opportunities for homeless households which at the same time saves the Council money. This initiative included establishing a £1.2 million capital programme to buy property for temporary accommodation. We now own eight properties and even with borrowing costs and running costs, the Council has secured an overall net saving of between £10,000-£15,000 for each unit. For example not having to use so much bed and breakfast facilities has drastically cut our costs and the new measures put in place have seen a £150,000 reduction in costs this year on what we were spending on temporary accommodation back in 2017/18 year. Homelessness applicants have also been provided with better quality accommodation which is more suitable for their needs.

The second submission we have made is for the team of the year award. This is about 'Safe Sleep' and the interagency collaboration providing safety, care and opportunity for rough sleepers. I love the fact that the team has developed a collaborative ethos which has led to a unique integration of services in North Devon.

The third submission is about the campaigns that we have carried out with the Environmental Wardens and the Communications team around fly tipping/littering.

We have been doing an in-depth review of the waste and recycling service in conjunction with Vanguard. This has included consultation with staff, management and the public and ideas for improvement are now being considered and in some cases changes have already been made. For example, some of our systems have not been good enough to ensure that we provide a cost efficient service.

I am pleased to say that the signing of the contract for the new leisure centre in Barnstaple is imminent and work is due to start in the spring and will be hopefully completed by August 2021.

It was good to attend the cutting of the ribbon for the Barnstaple museum extension and to see what an excellent addition it is. It is providing an excellent visitor attraction.

District Councils throughout Devon appear to be well on their way to adopting plans to reduce their carbon footprint and protect the environment. At the recent Devon District Council forum most stated that they are hoping to agree their action plans by early in the New Year.

Since the last full Council meeting many NDC members have attended a very successful environment workshop organised by 361 Community Energy. 361 Community Energy is a not for profit organisation, helping to fight climate change and alleviate fuel poverty in Northern Devon. For those eligible they offer a completely free of charge service called LEAP (Local Energy Advice Partnership). To be eligible you must have a low income or receive tax credits or housing benefit or receive a disability related benefit or have a long term illness or disability. If you qualify you are entitled to a free home visit from a home energy advisor. They will check to see if residents are on the cheapest energy tariffs, install free simple energy saving measures, give energy efficiency hints and tips etc. They can be contacted on 0800 060 7567.

Our council also has money available for grants for properties for those who have a disability. This includes:

1. A new small works' grant for urgent repairs.
2. Putting in place a specific grant for stair lifts where the applicant is not subject to a financial test of resources.
3. Increasing the 'top up' funding available for energy efficiency measures, where energy providers are part funding energy efficiency measures under their Energy Company Obligation (ECO), to £2,000 per property.

ECO is designed to support households that are deemed to be vulnerable and in fuel poverty. So far over 400 households have benefited from the current arrangements. We are hoping to extend this and make a very positive contribution towards the new Corporate Priority of 'cherishing and protecting the environment'.

Since the last full council we have had Heart of the South West and Local Enterprise Partnership meetings in Exeter where we discussed with south west councils ideas to put jointly to government about green growth and improving productivity in Devon and Somerset and the possible effects on our economy of Brexit. Of course all of this may change as we now know that we are to have a General Election on December 12th. By the time you are reading this we will know the names of all the candidates

for North Devon as the nominations close on 14th November. Postal vote applications need to be received by 5.00 p.m on 26th November and will be sent out on Thursday 28th November by 1st Class post. Electors will receive a poll card giving instructions of the times of the poll and the venue where they may vote. The count this time will be in the Tarka Tennis centre, not in the Leisure Centre.

I have just heard the good news that we have been shortlisted for two awards from the Local Government Chronicle. This is in the team of the year and in the communication campaign categories. That is brilliant for a relatively small council like ours. Please make a point of congratulating all those involved.

David Worden
Leader North Devon Council

11th November 2019.