

December Councillor report.

It seems the draft regulations for the Combined County Authority (Devon County and Torbay) has been put before Parliament. This means the authority will go ahead in the area. There is an upfront grant of £16 million half of which will be spent on affordable housing with the cooperation of the districts.

The county finance team have been busy putting together a best estimate budget for 2025/26 but unfortunately the government dropped a spanner in the works on 28 November when it announced its reforms of local government funding! In broad terms this means less money to Devon County Council and our districts. As we live in a rural area providing services is more expensive than in cities but despite this the government is going to reduce the rural services delivery grant by £10 million. They are also reducing the recovery grant by £2.5 million and the social care grant by an enormous £6 million. The total impact of the reductions outweigh the £6 million increases in various areas. It looks as if the total reduction in funding could be between £13 and £14 million. On top of this the finance team have had to cope with the budget predictions which could mean an increase of between £13 and £20 million unless the government helps with the increase in employer's National Insurance contributions.

Shortly after storm Darragh hit Devon I had a meeting with several senior officers from the highways team. For once it was all pretty good news! During the weekend of the storm, the emergency call centre received over 700 calls, 300 these to report fallen trees. County dispatched 24 teams over the weekend to deal with this problem, we have a very good contract with emergency teams which we can call on in such events as occurred that weekend. For the moment the emergency budget is not overspent but of course there are still many months of winter left.

The Ministry of Transport has awarded £10 million to Devon County Council to help with its Bus Improvement Plan. £5m is for capital and £5m for expenditure. There are plans to purchase more buses and also to improve rural services. Residents in Morchard Bishop will soon see that their services are to increase. I've also pressed for improved frequency for buses through Crediton and also for a more reliable service. Let me know of any problems on local bus services please.

Recycling and waste seem to be improving which is a very good thing because it means we earn more from selling recycled material and spend less for using landfill.

The hot topic of the day is the governments English Devolution White Paper. Responses need to be in to government by 10 January and so we are having a special meeting the day before! We already have in place for January the new Cmbined Council Authority which links DCC with Torbay Council. The eight district councils are not happy however and I do not blame them. Plymouth is a statutory authority even though it has only half the required population to properly qualify! We live in a crazy world of shifting sands.

Let me take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy festive period and a healthy and peaceful New Year.

Cllr Frank Letch MBE