

County Councillor's Report, March 2021

Devon County Council agrees standstill budget for services

The budget provides significant increases for adult and children's social care, but these are almost entirely in order to meet increased demand and costs, rather than improvements to services. The only other big increase was to improve the Council's IT systems. Services which benefit the population as a whole, like Highways and Libraries, have seen no significant increase in funding.

Independent councillors' proposals for (1) reintroduction of lengths-persons in parishes (2) funding for rural cycle routes (like the Stop Line Way) and (3) a £200,000 new book fund to relaunch the library service, after years of running down the book stock, were all rejected by the Conservatives, as were many good proposals by the Liberal Democrats.

Council Tax will rise by 4.99 per cent, compared to general inflation of 0.7 per cent

This is the sixth above-inflation rise in a row, bringing the increase to 30 per cent over 6 years. 3 per cent of this year's rise is for social care. The Government has refused to pay for this out of national taxation, forcing councils to increase council tax instead.

The Independents' proposal to cancel the other proposed 1.99 per cent rise, as a gesture of relief for council tax payers, and take the money from reserves instead, was rejected by the Tories. Our proposal would still have left the Council with over £100m reserves (to put this in perspective, even in this very uncertain year, the Council has only needed to draw on £3m of its reserves).

May elections to go ahead, but leafleting banned in blatantly discriminatory move

The Government has announced that the County Council and Police Commissioner elections will go ahead, despite concerns for the safety of voters and (especially) polling station staff raised by many councils, since most adults will still not have any protection from vaccination at this stage.

Nothing has been done to make postal voting easier - you cannot apply online, only **download an application form or phone East Devon Electoral Services on 01395 517402 for one**. You must of course be on the electoral register before you can apply for a postal vote, if you're not on at your current address. This **can** be done online at <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>.

The Government has banned canvassing and leafleting, so that candidates will have to pay commercial deliverers to distribute leaflets. This discriminates against Independents and less-well-off parties, and favours the Conservative Party, who are already posting leaflets to voters. I raised these issues as urgent issues at Devon County Council, but the Tories refused to allow them be discussed. They will come back a few days before the election!

Seaton's Beach Management Plan is now fully funded

As a member of the Stakeholder Group, I was delighted to hear that EDDC, led by my Independent colleague Paul Arnott of Colyton, had secured the funding for the scheme, which will renew the defences between the town centre and Seaton Hole.

Local vaccine rollout continues at Seaton Hospital

I received my first dose on 8th February and it was great to see the hospital being so well used. The national NHS system, with online booking for Taunton Racecourse or Westpoint, is calling 64-year-olds at the time of writing (26 February).

NHS plan to restore normal services, especially elective surgery

Health Scrutiny committee members received a presentation from the Devon NHS showing their plans to restore services in the RD&E and by using private hospitals, as the urgent demand from Covid declines.