

## County Councillor report for January 2024 – Cllr Marcus Hartnell

Happy New Year.

This month's report focuses on the finances of Devon County Council ahead of target setting for the various service areas of the Council ahead of budget setting for 2024/24 in what is going to be an interesting year for everyone in Local and National Government.

### Budget 2024/2025

Setting the DCC Budget for 2024/25 is like any year, a huge task for a large-scale organisation. Over 79% of the nett revenue budget of £743.4million proposed for 2024/25 is spent on children's and adult service areas i.e. £588.5m with £154.8m for the others.

Demand in these two areas in particular continues to surge, where DCC must legally provide them, often at very high costs over and above what is termed discretionary services, such as routine roads maintenance (other than safety issues) of a 12,000 mile road network, bus service subsidies, climate change initiatives and much more.

	2023/24 Adjusted Base Budget £000	Inflation and National Living Wage £000	Other Growth and Pressures £000	Savings, Alternative Funding and Additional Income £000	2024/25 Target Budget £000	Net Change 2023/24 to 2024/25 £000 %	
Integrated Adult Social Care	340,245	29,887	20,025	(29,411)	360,746	20,501	6.0%
Children and Young People's Futures	206,278	9,795	20,862	(9,150)	227,785	21,507	10.4%
Public Health, Communities & Prosperity	21,678	533	289	(1,577)	20,923	(755)	-3.5%
Corporate Services	49,755	2,160	1,361	(4,831)	48,445	(1,310)	-2.6%
Climate Change, Environment & Transport	81,619	6,144	2,348	(4,629)	85,482	3,863	4.7%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>699,575</b>	<b>48,519</b>	<b>44,886</b>	<b>(49,598)</b>	<b>743,382</b>	<b>43,807</b>	<b>6.3%</b>

*The 2023/24 Base Budget has been adjusted for permanent virements (budget transfers from other budget lines)*

The funding for this comes from a wide range of Core funding income from the Government and Other Grants totalling around £236.4m, but most of the income is derived from Council tax and a share of Business rates.

This is set against set against a background inflationary cost of living pressures and huge challenges to Local Government in general. Social care provision is particularly impacted by increases to the national living wage, which at first glance a 30p per hour increase announced by the Government does not seem vast. However, it will add an extra £25.7m to the DCC wage bill, which will need to come from further savings and efficiencies.

There is an above inflation proposed 10.4 per cent increase in the revenue budget for children's services with a 6 per cent rise in adult services and 4.7 per cent extra for climate change, environment, and transport

Reductions in other departmental spending means an overall rise of 6.3 per cent in the council's budget for next year within the total spend of over £743 million where Officers of the Council have worked closely with the DCC Cabinet to secure best value across Devon's operations and ensure continuing financial sustainability.

To set a balanced budget, savings, alternative funding, and additional income of £49.6 million have been identified. Overall, there is additional funding of £43.8 million or 6.3% for services next year. It is not planned to support the proposed budget targets by using general reserve balances. This reflects a strategy of DCC living within its means and to set service budgets that are affordable.

### **Changes to Taunton Bus Service**

There is a small but important enhancement to the 20 bus service that operates from Seaton to Taunton with Dartline. The enhancement will extend the morning and afternoon peak journeys to Richard Huish College. This will greatly benefit students who currently must walk between the Town centre and the College.

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2024, the 07:01 journey from Honiton to Taunton will continue to Richard Huish College, and the 17:15 departure from Taunton will now depart from the college at 17:05. This will operate on college days only.

To allow extra time for the route extension to college, the 15:00 journey from Seaton will now depart at 14:50 Monday to Saturday and run 10 minutes earlier throughout the journey to Taunton. This will happen on every day of operation (regardless of the college being open or closed) to give daily continuity for passengers.

### **Multi-use Trail update – Seaton**

There was a soft opening of the new section of the multi-use trail over the Christmas period. There is a section that is narrowed around the electricity pole which is due to be rectified in the new year. It is likely that we'll have to temporarily close the path in early Jan for the planting to be complete. Once this is done a formal opening date will be announced.

### **Additional highways funding**

The autumn statement awarded an additional £13m+ in highways funding for DCC, with £6.6m available as an in-year award. This means that identified schemes within the county can be brought forward and delivered sooner than expected. For Seaton & Colyton this means Valley View will be patched and surface dressed this financial year along with additional schemes in Widworthy.

***As a reminder***, please use the “Report a problem” page on the DCC website to report potholes, fallen trees, blocked drains and much more. This is the quickest and easiest way to inform DCC of defects or problems, with the ability to upload photos and pinpoint problems for our teams to locate and fix.

[Report a problem - Roads and transport \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/report-a-problem)

## **Minor Highways Improvements could be funded by Town & Parishes**

Communities who ask to use their own money to make minor improvements to roads in their area will soon be able to do so after DCC cabinet today gave a trial scheme the go-ahead.

Self-delivery schemes could be for a 20mph zone or traffic calming for instance.

In December the cabinet approved recommendations for a Community Self-Delivery of Highway Improvements trial, a proposal that had cross-party support. A step-by-step guide or 'checklist' will be published enabling communities to understand the steps that are required before any work is carried out. Our highways service receives requests from communities for permission to pay for and make small improvements to a highway in their area. These requests are where communities have funding in place, but our highways service lacks the capacity to deliver it on their behalf as quickly the community would like. The results of the trial will then help us determine if the proposal should be turned into a permanent scheme.

The guide itself has been co-authored by the Highways and Traffic Management Service with the support of the Engineering Design Group and lays out the typical steps that need consideration before work is carried out.

Steps include appointing a competent designer, environmental considerations, road safety and maintenance audits, consultation with affected parties and any changes to Traffic Regulation Orders.

## **Proposed changes to Seafont Bus Stops**

DCC are currently consulting on plans to change the configuration of bus stops on Seaton seafront. You can view and comment on the plans by 15<sup>th</sup> January here [All proposed traffic schemes - Roads and transport \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/transport/roads-and-transport/proposed-traffic-schemes)

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