

County Councillor's Report 19th March - Coffinswell

Devon County have agreed a 4.99% increase in council tax for the coming financial year – 2024/25. It comprises 2.99% for general services with an extra 2% for adult care.

There will be increases of 10.4% in spending on children's services, 6% on adult services and 4.7% on climate change, environment and transport.

Councillors also agreed an extra £1.5 million to boost regular road drainage since the target budget was set last month to tackle the increase in potholes caused by this winter's heavy rainfall. There will also be £716,000 extra to bring the homelessness budget back up to £1.45 million to support the work of district councils and homeless organisations for another year.

Devon's revenue spending on services will increase from just under £700 million to £743 million in 2024/25. That's an overall rise of 6.3 per cent in spending.

In addition, councillors approved a capital budget of over £155 million for investment in infrastructure such as schools and roads.

The council tax for an average Band D home will rise by £81.54 to £1,715.67 – an extra £1.56 a week.

The budget was approved by 34 votes to 14. I, however, did not vote for this Budget, preferring the Opposition Lib Dem motion to add a further £1.5million for pothole repairs, £1/2 million for white lining and an additional £60,000 for Libraries Unlimited to help them increase Community Library provision in the wake of the mobile libraries being disbanded – this amendment was voted down by the Conservatives.

The Council are inviting families, professionals and community organisations to help shape services that support young families. It follows a national move, announced by the Government last year, for Children's Centres to become Family Hubs, as part of its Start for Life Programme initiative.

In Devon that means extending the age range, from current services that deliver targeted support to 0 to 8 year-olds, to future services that provide targeted and universal support to 0 to 19 year-olds, or up to 25 year-old young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. It would mean a wider range of services than at present, including support from local community groups, working together to help young families.

The council commissions the charity Action for Children to run Children's Centres in Devon on their behalf. The charity is already working with neighbouring Plymouth and Torbay councils to help their transition, and now they're working with Devon County Council to do the same.

Exactly which services will be integrated into a Family Hub will very much depend on the needs of local families. But the kind of services that families could access include early years services and education; Public Health Nursing and Midwifery services; activities delivered by local groups; drug, alcohol and domestic abuse support; mental health support and youth services.

Family Hubs will be located in areas of greatest need, with outreach services extending from them into local communities.

The consultation is at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/haveyoursay/consultations/family-hubs-engagement/>

A six-week public consultation was launched on Monday 12th February on the draft proposal to create a Combined County Authority (CCA) for Devon and Torbay to oversee new powers and funding transferred from Government.

The ground-breaking devolution deal announced by the Levelling Up Minister last month, proposes to create the CCA, which would be a formal partnership of elected members drawn from the councils of Devon and Torbay, including district councils, together with representatives from business and education.

People are being invited to have their say on how the CCA would work, the powers that it would have and the functions it would be responsible for. These include investment in local economic growth, delivering affordable housing, improving public transport, and meeting net zero ambitions.

Further information about our joint consultation with Torbay Council and details of how to respond are available at www.devontorbaydeal.org.uk

More than 10,000 trees are being planted this winter through the first season of our newly awarded Local Authority Treescapes Fund. The community planting scheme is being rolled out across Devon this winter with the help of local not-for-profit social enterprise ParkLife South West. This is being carried out alongside the planting of 2,250 trees this winter by landowners and communities who applied to the Free Tree scheme.

It's the third and final year that we have received support for the scheme through the Emergency Tree Fund granted by The Woodland Trust. Since Devon first piloted the Free Tree Scheme in 2019, and combining all of the tree planting initiatives, we have planted just over 48,000 trees in total as part of ongoing efforts to meet the carbon net zero targets by 2030.

Finally, after months of work, the Teignmouth Hospital closure Standing Overview Group, of which I was a member, presented its report to the Health and Adult Care Committee recommending re-referral to the Secretary of State. This was within days of that power being removed from the committee by legislation. Sadly, the Committee declined to refer after the Conservative Group blocked the move. This represents the latest small hospital that the Council has effectively written off despite local opposition.

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