

## County Councillor's Report 20<sup>th</sup> June - Coffinswell

Devon County Council agreed to an in-depth review to address “serious” failures in its governance. A report presented to the council’s Procedures committee says the authority “finds itself in a very different operating context and the need for a review of priorities is required.”

Describing the council’s internal position as “very challenging,” it cites failing children’s services and budget sustainability as two major factors, whilst accepting there is “concern from stakeholders regarding confidence in the council to address these challenges.”

Westminster has already issued the council with an improvement notice, adding in December that it was “extremely concerned” about its children’s services. A commissioner has been appointed to oversee improvement.

The report also warns there is a “material threat of a s114 notice” – an effective declaration of bankruptcy – due to a growing overspend on caring for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Since 2020, Devon’s total running overspend on the SEND service – effectively debt – has risen to around £127 million, a figure projected to increase to £153 million by March 2024. The amount is more than the county has in reserves.

The report goes on to state, in light of recent management changes and the pandemic: “This is an opportune time to consider ... future governance arrangements, making the necessary improvements as expected by the minister, the DFE, the commissioner and the SEND improvement board.”

The “root and branch” review will be split into two phases, each lasting six months. It will be led by a cross-party working group of the procedures committee, which exists to review the council’s constitution and how it functions.

Devon is asking people to give their views on a regional strategy that will help ensure that that the South West can make the changes needed to cope with the worst effects of climate change.

To effectively respond to the climate crises, it is vital that strategies are put in place to deal with both the cause of rising greenhouse gases and their effect on our communities, also called Mitigation and Adaptation.

Mitigation focuses on tackling the causes of climate change by reducing the emission of greenhouse gases to net-zero. Whereas Adaptation is the process of adjusting to the impacts of climate change that we are already seeing and can be expected in the future.

The Strategy accepts that significant climate ‘shocks’ are inevitable, and as the world grows warmer, different places, depending on factors like geography and population, will be affected in different ways.

Our region has approximately 1500km of coastline, and rising sea levels of up to 78cm by the 2080s will put the region’s low lying and coastal communities at increased risk while extreme weather events such as storms could lead to increased flooding for communities near rivers and watercourses. As global temperatures rise, the seas will become more acidic, putting fishing stocks at risk.

The second part is the Adaptation Plan which sets out the conditions to enable regional partners to act on adapting to climate change together; and finally, an Action Plan, highlighting where we should focus our efforts over the next five years.

You can view the Strategy, a series of 'short-reads' and respond to the consultation here [www.climate-resilient-dcios.org.uk/](http://www.climate-resilient-dcios.org.uk/) It finished on 30<sup>th</sup> June

Parents of children aged five to 16, who receive benefit-related free school meals, are being invited to take part in a range of exciting activities over the Summer holidays.

The government-funded Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme offers free activities, plus healthy meals during the school holidays.

Devon have teamed up with over 60 different activity providers across Devon to offer a great range of indoor and outdoor activities.

A full list of the activities and how to apply are on the HAF website: [devon.cc/haf-summer23](http://devon.cc/haf-summer23)

Activities include sports, swimming, football, paddle boarding, kayaking, canoeing, mountain biking, tennis, hockey, athletics, bowling, cross fit, gardening, Yoga crate stacking and zipline.

Other activities include arts and crafts, fun with food sessions, 'the floor is lava', outdoor treasure hunts, forest school and board games.

Some providers are offering special visits from storytellers, magicians, animals, and trips to local attractions.

This year, there are more places available for secondary school age ranges, with activities including go-karting, climbing, trampolining, high ropes and surfing.

Alistair Dewhirst - [alistair.dewhirst@devon.gov.uk](mailto:alistair.dewhirst@devon.gov.uk) / Tel 07836 704127