

Devon are launching a major drive to establish a wide network of community libraries in Devon's rural areas. They will be developed as an alternative to the current mobile library service which will be discontinued by February.

Devon's Cabinet agreed to decommission the mobile library vehicles and to help community groups and parish councils set up new community libraries.

This came after I called the decision in to Scrutiny and cross party councillors asked the Cabinet to rethink their proposals to terminate the service. The Cabinet heard from residents that the service was a lifeline for many vulnerable people in rural locations. The request to re-think was supported by our Queen, the Children's Laureate, and a number of Devon authors as well as councillors across Devon.

The Cabinet heard that the four library vehicles are close to becoming obsolete and are increasingly off the road for repairs and maintenance. It would cost £637,000 to replace them, £736,000 to lease the vehicles over three years and £799,000 for five years. Later in the meeting the Cabinet agreed to spend nearly £57 million on improving the road from Newton Abbot to Trago Mills.

Thousands of Devon residents who are struggling with the cost of living can get extra support this winter. Earlier this year DCC secured £10m from the fourth round of the Government's Household Support Fund to cover the period from April 2023 until March 2024

The money comes with conditions on how it can be allocated and is to support households in most need – those that are struggling to pay for food, energy, water bills and other related essentials. It is also intended for those that may not be eligible for other government support.

So far under this fourth round of the scheme, we've deployed over £5 million supporting more than 38,000 households across Devon.

And now with winter approaching, Devon are working with our Team Devon partners (district and city councils) and other community organisations to provide the most vulnerable residents with rapid short-term financial support.

The homeless, low income families, those who are suffering from ill health and ethnic minorities are just some of the many groups who will benefit from schemes including free school meal holiday vouchers, hardship payments, pre-payment and credit energy meter support, community grants and funding for minor energy efficiency measures.

We're also working with the Devon Community Foundation to provide grants to voluntary sector organisations supporting communities that don't always get the help they need. Their 'Food, Fuel and More' grant scheme was well received this year and will re-open this winter.

The scheme will offer large grants of up to £25,000 to organisations that support homeless people or people in temporary or insecure housing. Groups supporting households with disabled residents or those suffering ill-health which has a direct impact on household income and an ability to meet food and energy bills, are also encouraged to apply, along with organisations that support Asian, black, traveller, Gypsy, Roma and ethnic minority communities who are not accessing support through other channels. They will also be operating a small grants scheme of up to £2,000 for smaller community initiatives.

Around 400 more free training places are being offered through the Train4Tomorrow Skills Bootcamps after Devon secured an extra £900,000 for our training programme. The scheme is responding to employers across Devon to help them bring the right skills into their business and to upskill existing staff.

Aimed at adults aged 19 and over, the flexible, short courses run for up to 16 weeks, delivering skills training across a variety of priority sectors including digital, technical, construction, green skills, health & social care, and professional services.

More than 30 courses are currently recruiting for learners, including in Data Analysis, Construction Skills, Digital Marketing, Welding, Electric Vehicle Technician, Regenerative Farming, Working in Health & Social Care, Cyber Security, Project Management, Hospitality, Web Design and many more.

The courses have been designed with the help of employers to meet skills gaps and fill open vacancies within the region. Throughout the last three years, Train4Tomorrow has enabled over 2,000 adults across Devon and Cornwall to kickstart a new career, upskill or change roles.

Skills Bootcamps, which we deliver in partnership with Cornwall Council, are open to adults who live in the region. Those seeking new employment are guaranteed an interview with a local employer on completion of the course.

To check out your eligibility and find out more about Skills Bootcamps across Devon and Cornwall, visit <https://www.train4tomorrow.org.uk/>

A record funding award for Bikeability cycle training in Devon means that more than 11,000 children will be able to improve their skills on two wheels next year. The grant of just over £484,000 for 2024/25 is the highest amount Devon have ever received for Bikeability in the 17 years we've been delivering it.

Earlier this year Devon achieved the milestone of 100,000 Bikeability trainees. It was also named among the top ten local authorities for providing Bikeability for Year Six school pupils, with figures from the Bikeability Trust showing that more than 8,500 or 71% of Year Six pupils across the county were trained between April 2022 and March 2023.

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