

Axminster Division Report 9th August 2022

DCC Finances update:

Devon County Council is facing a very challenging financial situation, forecast to overspend about £30 million and rising costs and inflation could add a further £10 million. We are not alone in this; many other councils are facing a similar situation.

Increasing needs and demand for services will continue into next year (2023/24) and beyond so we need to focus on both short-term opportunities to generate savings and longer-term transformation to ensure we create a sustainable future and deliver our strategic vision and priorities.

Devon County Council is committed to working collectively across the whole council. As part of this response, a Financial Sustainability Programme has been developed and brought together a group of leaders forward this work over the summer and in to September.

Over the last three weeks about £26 million of one-off and ongoing savings have been identified and we are continuing to look at other opportunities including identifying areas for creating efficiency, understanding and responding to demand differently, reducing our property estate and the cost of buildings, reducing expenditure on contracts, and increasing income generation. Part of this is to **'Members Locality Budgets'** until the complete picture is known (other than those where applications have already been submitted).

Many opportunities are also being identified to change the way we at DCC do things and work together to ensure better value and outcomes for people in the longer-term.

The team doing this work has come together at short notice and committed time and resources to respond to this challenge. This has been hugely valuable, not just in terms of identifying additional savings but also developing relationships and understanding of the whole council's business, which will stand us in excellent stead for identifying further transformation opportunities, where many new ways of working were put in to practice at short notice during the darkest days of the pandemic.

New anonymous digital mental health support service launched across Devon:

A new free and confidential digital mental health and wellbeing service for adults is now available across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

NHS Devon, working in partnership with Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Councils, has commissioned Qwell to ensure all adults in Devon have access to a choice of support to manage their own emotional health and wellbeing. It offers a safe online space for adults to access therapeutic activities and content including a peer support community. This includes self-help articles, forums, and discussion boards that are moderated by qualified practitioners. Users can also keep an online journal and monitor their wellbeing through an interactive goal tracker.

There's also a one-on-one live text chat and messaging counselling service with a team of qualified practitioners. Appointments can be booked in advance

or accessed through a drop-in text-based chat which runs from midday to 10pm on weekdays, and from 6pm to 10pm at the weekend. Anyone over the age of 18 years old living in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay can access support from Qwell at <https://www.qwell.io/> without a referral from a health professional and there is no criteria to qualify for support.

Bird Flu:

Bird flu, or avian influenza to give its correct name, is primarily a disease of birds and we are aware of some cases currently in Devon.

The risk to public health is very low as it is not an airborne disease.

However, it is really important that you do not touch or pick up any dead or visibly sick birds that you see while out and about and, if you have a dog, make sure they stay clear too.

If you find dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or other dead wild birds, such as gulls or birds of prey, you should report them to the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77.

Bird flu is a notifiable animal disease. If you suspect any type of avian influenza in poultry or captive birds, you must report it by calling the Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301.

Full guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu#public>

Driving down carbon emissions on Devon's highways:

Our ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030 is ahead of schedule, as we announce our next phase in cutting carbon from Devon's roads maintenance. Phase one, announced last year, saw us become one of the first councils in the country to develop a carbon calculator, a clever way of identifying the carbon emissions produced in every step of highway maintenance.

From the materials used; the labour involved; the distance and the type of transport used to get the materials and engineers to site; the longevity of the materials used and how long the repairs will last – that's some of the data, crunched by the carbon calculator that identifies the carbon emissions for that specific highway project.

Knowing all this in advance and planning it in at the early design stage of a job – building a new road or structure say, or repairs to an existing road – puts us in the best position to cut the anticipated amount of carbon generated by the project.

It's already led to innovative changes in the way we and our contractors carry out highway repairs in Devon, using different materials and techniques, and recycling and re-using material as close to site as possible, for example, with significant reductions in carbon emissions.

So, if phase one is about eliminating carbon emissions at the design stage, phase two, which is being introduced in the next few weeks, is about tracking the actual carbon emitted at construction or repair stage.

Contractors have worked with us on designing this next phase, which will ask them to share their live data on completed projects.

Example of how this works with a stretch of road that requires re-surfacing.

We want contractors to report back on the quantity of work they have carried out; the materials they've used, e.g. asphalt type – the amount of that

material; how it got to site; what kind of fuel was used to get it to site; how far it's travelled; the equipment needed on site, the fuel it uses and where it's come from; the waste created and what happens to that waste etc.

The detail helps to build a carbon profile that tells us and the contractor what the carbon emissions for that project have been.

Experts at the University of Exeter are working with us, and they've developed an algorithm to crunch the data and create a dashboard to visualise it in a consistent way for all highways projects.