

Agenda for Cabinet Wednesday, 8th January, 2025, 6.00 pm

Members of Cabinet

Councillors: M Rixson, G Jung, D Ledger, S Jackson, J Loudoun, N Hookway, P Arnott (Chair), P Hayward (Vice-Chair), S Hawkins and T Olive

Venue: Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton

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This meeting is being recorded for subsequent publication on the Council's website and will be streamed live to the [East Devon District Council Youtube Channel](#)

- 1 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 November 2024 (Pages 3 - 14)
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Declarations of interest
Guidance is available online to Councillors and co-opted members on making [declarations of interest](#)
- 4 Public speaking
Information on [public speaking is available online](#)
- 5 Matters of urgency
Information on [matters of urgency](#) is available online

There is one item to be dealt with in this way at item 21 - English Devolution White Paper.
- 6 Confidential/exempt item(s)
To agree any items to be dealt with after the public (including the Press) have been excluded. There are no items which officers recommend should be dealt with in this way.
- 7 Minutes of Scrutiny Committee held on 7 November 2024 (Pages 15 - 21)
- 8 Minutes of Asset Management Forum held on 2 December 2024 (Pages 22 - 24)
- 9 Minutes of Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront Group held on 10 December 2024 (Pages 25 - 27)

- 10 Minutes of Exmouth Beach Management Plan Steering Group held on 23 October 2024 (Pages 28 - 30)
- 11 Minutes of Joint meeting of the Overview Committee and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 December 2024 (Pages 31 - 37)
- 12 Minutes of the Cranbrook Placemaking Group held on 18 November 2024 (Pages 38 - 40)

Key Matters for Decision

- 13 Council Tax Base 2025/26 (Pages 41 - 45)
- 14 Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26 (Pages 46 - 51)

Matters for Decision

- 15 **Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets 2025/26** (Pages 52 - 76)
- 16 **East Devon National Landscape Management Plan consultation** (Pages 77 - 79)
- 17 **Culture Strategy 2022 - 2031 support** (Pages 80 - 85)
- 18 **Draft Housing Strategy** (Pages 86 - 118)
- 19 **Corporate Peer Challenge Review outcome** (Pages 119 - 151)
- 20 **Appointment to the Devon and Torbay Housing Advisory Group** (Pages 152 - 154)
- 21 **English Devolution White Paper** (Pages 155 - 168)

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Members of the public exercising their right to speak during Public Speaking will be recorded.

[Decision making and equalities](#)

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EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 27 November 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.08 pm and ended at 8.28 pm

86 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting of Cabinet held on 30 October 2024 were agreed.

87 Declarations of interest

Min 92. Minutes of Budget Setting and Capital Allocations Panel held on 11 November 2024.

Councillor Sam Hawkins, Affects Non-registerable Interest, member of Cranbrook Town Council.

Min 98. River Axe SAC Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund Round 2 award.

Councillor Paul Hayward, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Employed as the Clerk to Axminster Town Council.

Min 98. River Axe SAC Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund Round 2 award.

Councillor Sarah Jackson, Affects Non-registerable Interest, the nature of which I am not required to disclose under section 32 of the Localism act 2011.

Min 99. Cranbox Modular Space Delivery in Cranbrook Town Centre.

Councillor Kevin Blakey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, member of Cranbrook Town Council.

Min 99. Cranbox Modular Space Delivery in Cranbrook Town Centre.

Councillor Paul Hayward, Affects Non-registerable Interest, has family members living in Cranbrook.

Min 99. Cranbox Modular Space Delivery in Cranbrook Town Centre.

Councillor Sam Hawkins, Other Registerable Interest, member of Cranbrook Town Council.

Min 102. UKSPF Programme amendment.

Councillor Paul Hayward, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Employed as the Clerk to Axminster Town Council.

Min 102. UKSPF Programme amendment.

Councillor Sarah Jackson, Affects Non-registerable Interest, the nature of which I am not required to disclose under section 32 of the Localism act 2011.

Min 104. Government consultation on remote attendance and proxy voting at Council meetings.

Councillor Paul Hayward, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Employed as the Clerk to Axminster Town Council.

Min 104. Government consultation on remote attendance and proxy voting at Council meetings.

Councillor Sarah Jackson, Affects Non-registerable Interest, the nature of which I am not required to disclose under section 32 of the Localism act 2011.

88 **Public speaking**

Martin Huscroft representing Kilmington Cricket Club, spoke on Minute 103 Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) – Dog Control 2023. He stated that dog fouling on the field of play had got worse during the Covid pandemic and the lockdowns associated with them despite the provision of dog waste bins. Since the 2023 Dogs on leads PSPO the issue had got significantly less. This protection was important to the cricket club as it had expanded its youth provision to younger members. The club had a duty of care to its members, sporting opponents and the school who use the field, they took this responsibility seriously but could only deliver with the protection the authority provided them. Dog fouling was anti-social and a health and safety issue with serious health implications, this was the cricket club's top priority.

John Lavender representing Kilmington Playing Fields Committee spoke on Minute 103 Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) – Dog Control 2023. The PSPO had addressed safeguarding issues regarding the primary school that frequently use the field especially for children who were anxious around dogs. Access to the children's playground area required crossing the field with some parents stating they use the playground more now that they don't have to worry about the dog mess in the field they had to walk through. The Kilmington Playing Fields Committee had recognised the value that members of the community placed on being able to walk their dogs in the field. They considered the need to reduce the risk and take into account the health and safety and well-being for people using the field and believed this would be achieved through a Dogs on Leads Policy.

89 **Matters of urgency**

There was one late item to be dealt with in this way recorded at Minute 108 Review of Leisure Provision - Funding and Management Agreement with LED Community Leisure.

90 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were two items dealt with in this way which are recorded at Minutes 107 and 108.

91 **Minutes of Overview Committee held on 24 October 2024**

Members noted the Minutes and recommendations of Overview Committee held on 24 October 2024.

Minute 14 East Devon Trees, Hedgerow and Woodlands Strategy

- The adoption of the final draft of the East Devon Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy 2024 – 2034 which reflects the ambitions and opportunities to protect East Devon's treescape and create opportunities for tree planting working in partnership with key stakeholders.
- To appoint a part time Tree & Woodland Project Officer role to enable the delivery of the Strategy. The budget and costs for this role are already secured within the existing salary budget due to a vacant part time role within the Tree team.

- To note the Overview Committee's concerns about the reduction of the enforcement role within the Tree team and to consider continuing including this vacant post in the establishment, going forward.

92 **Minutes of Budget Setting and Capital Allocations Panel held on 11 November 2024**

Members noted the Minutes and recommendations of Budget Setting and Capital Allocations Panel held on 11 November 2024.

Minute 6 Listing of Capital bids proposed

1. that the following bids be included in the Capital Programme:
 - a. Exmouth SANG for £1,580k in 2025/26 as forward funding in advance of securing funding from CIL and proportionate funding from Teignbridge District Council and Exeter City Council through the Habitat Regulations Executive Committee;
 - b. Lighting upgrade for parks and gardens across the District for £75k;
 - c. HRA Higher Brook Meadow replacement of play provision for £120k subject to transfer to General Fund;
 - d. Phear Park play area for £200k for 2025/26;
 - e. Events Team electrical outlets upgrade for £30k for 2025/26;
 - f. Recycling and Refuse Fleet requirements for £290k for 2025/26;
 - g. Fluvial works for £320k for 2025/26;
 - h. Exmouth BMP Phase 2 risk budget for £300k for 2025/26;
 - i. Seawall investigations for £30k for 2025/26;
 - j. Beer beach huts decking replacement for £75k for 2025/26;
 - k. Cliff works for £150k for 2025/26;
 - l. Bin replacement in Exmouth (Maer) for £20k for 2025/26;
 - m. Recycling and Refuse Depot and Plant for £78k for 2025/26;
 - n. Exmouth Pavilion electrical works for £34,500 for 2025/26;
 - o. Ocean Building terrace floor works for £55,500 for 2025/26 subject to being liable for works with delegated authority to the PH Finance, Director of Finance and Assistant Director Place, Assets and Commercialisation to agree to action if required;
 - p. Flooring works OSM and Honiton Leisure Centres for £72,500 for 2025/26 subject to confirmation on dual-site contribution;
 - q. Play equipment replacement for £50k for 2025/26;
 - r. Internal decorations and repairs for various LED buildings for £33,500 for 2025/26 and £33,500 for 2026/27 subject to confirmation on dual-site contribution;
 - s. Manor Gardens drainage for £75k for 2025/26;
 - t. Home Safeguard alarms for £465,810 for 2025/26;
 - u. UV Filtering for Exmouth, Honiton and Sidmouth pools for £88,500 for 2025/26;
 - v. Manor Pavilion roofing works for £15k for 2025/26 and £161,500 for 2026/27;
 - w. Swim pool underwater works for Exmouth, Honiton & Sidmouth for £60k for 2025/26;
 - x. External decorations and repairs for various corporate buildings for £153,500 for 2025/26; £153,500 for 2026/27; and £153,500 for 2027/28;
 - y. Cranbrook flagship play provision for £150k for 2025/26.
2. That the following bids put forward for inclusion are not supported at this time:
 - a. Norman Lockyer structural repairs for £157,500 for 2025/26 and £7,500 for 2026/27. This was deferred to permit further discussions between the Council and the Norman Lockyer Observatory Society;
 - b. Exmouth Pavilion toilet works for £61,900 for 2025/26 and £67,600 for 2026/27. This was deferred for later consideration as part of the wider consideration of the Leisure Strategy;
 - c. Glen Goyle footpath for £30k for 2025/26. This was deferred with a request made for officers to explore discussion with local stakeholders on funding.

93 **Minutes of Leisure Strategy Forum held on 11 November 2024**

Members noted the Minutes and recommendations of Leisure Strategy Forum held on 11 November 2024.

Minute 17 Outcome of Leisure Workshops

To endorse the proposed timetable and decision stages.

94 **Minutes of Recycling and Waste Partnership Board held on 12 November 2024**

Members noted the Minutes and recommendations of Recycling and Waste Partnership Board held on 12 November 2024.

Minute 13 – Joint contract and operations report

1. that the Recycling and Waste team run a communications campaign to promote greater awareness amongst residents on the safe disposal of batteries.
2. that the Recycling and Waste team undertake proactive communications to promote the use of the first electric recycling collection vehicle.
3. that the joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the budget volatility of material prices during the budget setting process.

Minute 18 – Bulky household waste collection charges

that Cabinet approve the proposed increase in bulky household waste collection charges from 1 December 2024 to cover the additional operational costs introduced by POPs regulations.

95 **Minutes of Housing Review Board held on 7 November 2024**

Members noted the Minutes and recommendations of Housing Review Board held on 7 November 2024.

Minute 24 Financial monitoring report

1. that Cabinet acknowledges the variances identified as part of the Revenue and Capital monitoring process up to month six.
2. that Cabinet approves the recommendation contained within the report to fund all Right to Buy acquisitions with 100% Right to Buy capital receipts and the £0.975m of budgeted borrowing released by this be utilised to fund the urgently required electrical compliance work.

Minute 26 Housing Revenue Account position statement

that Cabinet note the Housing Revenue Account update report.

Minute 27 Acquisitions and disposal policy

1. that the Strategic Acquisitions & Disposals Policy be adopted subject to 2(i) of the policy objectives being amended to 'Enhance Housing Stock; acquire properties meet the needs of our community, including good quality, affordable and accessible housing needs'.
2. that delegated authority be granted to the Director of Housing, in agreement with the S.151 Officer and the Director of Governance & Licensing (the Monitoring Officer), to authorise the disposal of individual non contiguous HRA assets up to a maximum value of £500,000, in accordance with the adopted 'Acquisitions and Disposals Policy' and in consultation with the

Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities.

3. that all acquisitions and disposals within the HRA be reported to the Housing Review Board and Cabinet.

96 **Minutes of Arts and Culture Forum held on 6 November 2024**

Members noted the Minutes and recommendations of Arts and Culture Forum held on 6 November 2024.

Minute 15 Funding requests from Villages in Action and Screen Devon

that subject to further information being provided on KPIs, that Cabinet approves the following funding requests:

1. Villages in Action - an uplift of £5,000 to their annual contribution from EDDC (currently £10,000) to support the recruitment of a new Network Lead in East Devon.
2. Screen Devon - £10,000.

97 **Elections update**

The Returning Officer updated members that after an election it was best practice to carry out an evaluation of election processes seeking feedback from appropriate stakeholders. That exercise had been carried out and would inform the project plan and risk register for future elections. The report specifically updated on the printing issue that led to a significant number of residents not receiving their poll cards in a timely manner and the steps that had been taken to minimise the risk of this occurring again. She confirmed that the printers had taken this issue very seriously and felt that processes both internally and externally had been further improved.

The Portfolio Holder Communications and Democracy thanked the Returning Officer and the Elections Team for their quick response in notifying Members to this situation. She agreed the council was now in a stronger position going forward.

There was discussion around poor postal delivery and the need to communicate with personnel within the postal service before the next election. It was highlighted that postal votes now have significant markings on the envelopes that made them stand out and identifying them as a priority within sorting offices. It was commented that residents do not need a poll card to vote which in the long term was more environmentally friendly.

RESOLVED:

That the Elections update be noted.

REASON:

To ensure that members were updated regarding the printing issue that arose in relation to the Parliamentary elections and that the learning from that and other lessons learnt, helped to inform the project plan and risk register for future electoral events.

98 **River Axe SAC Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund Round 2 award**

The Assistant Director Countryside and Leisure with support of the Chair and Cabinet wished to congratulate and thank Will Dommett the District Ecologist for his tremendous efforts in getting this vast amount of funding from the Government's Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund.

The District Ecologist presented his report outlining that the water quality of the River Axe Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) had been a concern for a long time. The River Axe SAC was in unfavourable and declining status owing to nutrient enrichment and sediment pollution. East Devon District Council, as the Competent Authority under the Habitat Regulations 2017, was required to consider the implications of these matters on the River Axe SAC before permitting any further development which had the potential to result in additional phosphate loads entering the catchment.

An Expression of Interest (EOI) outlining a proposal for £4 million was made by EDDC as lead authority in collaboration with both Dorset and Somerset Councils (who had parts of the River Axe SAC catchment within their boundaries), in April 2024 to Round 2 of the Government's Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund. The recent Budget in October included a £4.09 million allocation to EDDC and the River Axe catchment as one of the seven successful EOIs that were made in England. EDDC was also awarded an additional £192,494 in capacity support funding along with a further £100,000 through the Nutrient Support Fund.

Not all developers had the practical capacity to mitigate phosphates on site or the means to negotiate off-site mitigations directly. To unlock this position, it was therefore necessary for the council to facilitate a scheme to fund schemes that create mitigation credits, which it could then allocate to facilitate development.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

1. Welcome the outcome of the bid and approves the Council acting as the Accountable Body for the funds and entering into the accompanying Memorandum of Understanding and Grant Determination letter. Authority to agree terms being delegated to Director of Place in consultation with Director of Finance (S151 Officer) and Director of Governance (Monitoring Officer).
2. Endorses the establishment of a Programme Board to provide oversight and advise on the deployment of the funds to include representatives of Somerset and Dorset Councils.
3. Receives a further report setting out the Terms of Reference for the Programme Board and associated scheme of delegation necessary to operationalise the Mitigation Fund.
4. Endorses the recruitment of the Programme Manager, Project Manager and administration support roles be funded through the award and for to be hosted by the Council.

REASON:

To be able to deliver the River Axe SAC Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund scheme as detailed in the report and put in place the necessary legal, financial and reporting processes to enable the delivery of the £4.09 million that had been allocated by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government to the scheme programme.

99 Cranbox Modular Space Delivery in Cranbrook Town Centre

Cllr Kevin Blakey spoke on this item. He stated that Cranbrook Town Centre was finally becoming a benefit to the town especially with the opening of the new supermarket shortly. For the town to survive it need to thrive so had to be different not just good. The Cranbox project was not just about providing quick access to space but also gave

Cranbrook a unique selling point to draw business in. This project was 10 years in the making and action was required now. He stated he supported the recommendations.

Cllrs Kevin Blakey and Cllr Sam Hawkins spoke and then left the room during the debate and vote due to their being members of Cranbrook Town Council.

The Enterprise Zone Project Manager and Corporate Lead - Major Projects & Programmes (Interim) provided an update on the Cranbox project. The project delivered new commercial floorspace within Cranbrook Town Centre and had been developed by EDDC with the support of Cranbrook Town Council. The project had been awarded funding through the Devon & Torbay Net Zero Capital Programme, subject to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) sign off.

The Chair thanked the District and Town Councillors as well as the town clerk and all who had worked on the project for their hard efforts on getting this to this stage

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

1. That Studio 4 have been appointment through an NHS procurement framework to support the delivery of a planning application for the scheme, to the value of £25k from the Enterprise Zone programme budget be noted.
2. Accept the funding from the Devon & Torbay Net Zero Capital Programme, following MHCLG sign off 2. EDDC act as Accountable Body for the grant funding, with Cranbrook Town Council delivering the project.

REASON:

To support the delivery of Cranbrook Town Centre through the delivery of additional commercial floor space, using grant funding from the Devon & Torbay Net Zero Capital Programme be agreed.

100 **Peer Challenge review update**

The Portfolio Holder Council and Corporate Co-ordination presented the report that provided an overview of the Peer Challenge recommendations and the delivery plan to implement the recommendations. He thanked Jo Avery, Management Information Officer for her efforts in getting the report together.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

Receive the Peer Challenge recommendations and delivery plan and note the progress of the actions to date.

REASON:

To ensure that the recommendations from the Peer Challenge are actioned and delivered appropriately.

101 **Financial Monitoring Report 2024/25 - Month 6 September**

The Finance Manager gave a summary of the Council's overall financial position for 2024/25 at the end of month six (30 September 2024).

Current monitoring indicated that:

- The General Fund Balance was currently projected to be above the adopted level, no action was recommended for members consideration at this stage. Forecasts indicated a favourable position of £968k was predicted. The council continued to see a significant favourable position in treasury management interest.
- The Revised Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget approved by Council (July 2024) agreed the use of the HRA Balance up to £1.750m in year, with the acceptance this would take the HRA Balance below its minimum adopted level of £2.1m to £1.350m, to be replenished in future years. Expenditure was being maintained within this perimeter with ongoing analysis on future spending plans and projections to gain assurance on this position to financial year end.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

1. Acknowledge the variances identified as part of the Revenue and Capital Monitoring process up to Month 6.
2. Agree to the recommendation discussed in section 3.1 to fund all Right to buy Acquisitions with 100% Right to Buy Capital Receipts and the £0.975m of budgeted borrowing released by this decision be utilised to fund urgently required electrical compliance work.

REASON:

The report updated Members on the overall financial position of the Authority at set periods and included recommendations where corrective action was required for the remainder of the financial year.

102 **UKSPF Programme amendment**

The Director of Place presented the report that highlighted that MHCLG had recently updated the guidance on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), stating that all funded activity, including that delivered by third parties, must conclude by the end of the current financial year. This updated guidance now threatened several of the council's planned projects which were forecasting end dates beyond March 2025.

To complete all spend and activity by the March deadline, officers had explored alternative projects which could be fully delivered within the timeframe and demonstrate alignment with the UKSPF guidance. Phase 1 of EDDC's Public Toilet Investment Programme (PTIP), along with our Carbon Action Programme (CAP), met both criteria. Both initiatives were due to be completed and fully spent by the end of the financial year and were compatible with the UKSPF interventions.

There was now an opportunity to utilise remaining UKSPF funding by part-funding PTIP and CAP schemes. In return, it was recommended that the EDDC funding saved through the utilisation of the UKSPF budget was to be committed for the delivery of the remaining UKSPF projects. This cost-neutral solution ensured successful delivery of the PTIP, CAP and the UKSPF projects and reduced the likelihood of any underspend being returned to MHCLG. It allowed the council to retain the benefits of the UKSPF allocation within the local community and continue the positive impacts into the 2025/26 financial year.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader for his work on this, who in turn wished to thank officers, panel and forums members that had worked together in order to use this funding.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

1. Agrees to using EDDC's UKSPF and REPF allocation to part-fund up to £600,000 for the Public Toilet Investment Programme (PTIP) and up to £200,000 to part-fund the Carbon Action Programme (CAP).
2. Agrees to allocate and ringfence the internal funding saved through this measure to deliver all remaining UKSPF and REPF activity endorsed by Cabinet and/or the UKSPF Programme Management Panel. The amount of funding ringfenced will be equal to the total sum of UKSPF and REPF payments to part-fund the PTIP and CAP.
3. Agrees to give delegated authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the S151 officer and the Monitoring Officer, to determine the total amount of UKSPF and REPF funding (up to £800,000) to be allocated to part-fund the PTIP and CAP and to authorise the relevant payments.
4. Agrees to delegate authority for the ringfenced funding to the UKSPF Programme Management Panel and the Director of Place, in consultation with the S151 officer and the Monitoring Officer, to allocate the funding, amend existing projects and approve new projects (up to £800,000).

REASON:

Cabinet approval was required to ensure that UKSPF and REPF activity could continue following the updated guidance issued by MHCLG. This would significantly reduce the risk of EDDC having to repay a significant amount of funding back to MHCLG.

103 **Amendments to the Public Spaces Protection Order - Dog Control 2023**

The Assistant Director Environmental Health presented the report. Following the implementation of the Public Spaces Protection Order – Dog Control 2023, there were required corrections relating to Kilmington and Allhallows Playing Fields. Due to the time since the introduction of the Public Spaces Protection Order – Dog Control 2023, a period of public consultation was undertaken regarding the proposed variations. The report outlined the responses and made recommendations to be approved by Cabinet before the Order could be varied.

The Chair thanked residents from both communities for their contribution to this matter.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

Approve the following variations to the Public Spaces Protection Order – Dog Control 2023 made under the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014.

- Change the requirement for dogs to be kept on leads at Kilmington play area to a dog on lead requirement at Kilmington Playing Field and a dog exclusion requirement at the children's play area.
- Change the dog exclusion requirement at Allhallows playing fields, Honiton to only apply to the sports pitches.

REASON:

To ensure that the Public Spaces Protection Order - Dog Control 2023 reflects public opinion and was enforceable by authorised officers.

104 **Government consultation on remote attendance and proxy voting at Council meetings**

The Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer updated members to the fact the Government was currently conducting an eight-week consultation on the detail and implications of allowing remote and hybrid attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings in England.

Discussion included the following:

- Proxy voting was difficult to manage
- Proxy voting could be perceived as amounting to pre-determination.
- Proxy voting should not be an option
- This would enable councillors to attend more meetings
- Widens the demographic to becoming a councillor
- With the climate emergency this would help to reducing the carbon footprint
- Would be unfair if the technology was not available to do the job
- The need to move forward with current ways of working
- Promote the watching of meetings on council's YouTube channel
- The need for a mixture of in-person and remote meetings
- The choice of when and how you meet
- EDDC had been lobbying for this since lockdown
- Extra resilience when facing adverse weather conditions
- Helps the public to become more engaged

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

1. Agree the proposed response to the consultation and agree its submission to the Government.
2. That the Monitoring Officer share the response with all Town and Parish Councils in East Devon and encourage them to respond to the consultation by the 19 December 2024 deadline.

REASON:

To ensure that the Council had the opportunity to respond to the consultation.

105 **Update on the Council Plan delivery plan**

The report provided an overview of the progress made on the Council Plan delivery plan up to the second quarter of 2024/25.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

1. Receive the progress report of the delivery plan and note the progress of the actions to date.
2. To note the update on the new Corporate Performance System.

REASON:

To ensure that the objectives from the Council Plan were being actioned and delivered appropriately.

106 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Exclusion of Press and Public**

That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting as exempt information, of the description set out on the agenda, is likely to be disclosed and on balance the public interest is in discussing this item in private session (Part B).

107 **Towards Zero Carbon Development in the West End:**

Interconnector Project Part A

The recommendations as set out in the confidential report were agreed.

108 **Review of Leisure Provision - Funding and Management Agreement with LED Community Leisure**

The recommendations as set out in the confidential report were agreed.

Attendance List

Present:

Portfolio Holders

| | |
|-----------|---|
| M Rixson | Portfolio Holder Climate Action & Emergency Response |
| G Jung | Portfolio Holder Coast, Country and Environment |
| D Ledger | Portfolio Holder Sustainable Homes & Communities |
| S Jackson | Portfolio Holder Communications and Democracy |
| J Loudoun | Portfolio Holder Council and Corporate Co-ordination |
| N Hookway | Portfolio Holder Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism |
| P Arnott | Leader of the Council |
| P Hayward | Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder Economy and Assets |
| S Hawkins | Portfolio Holder Finance, Group Leader of Cranbrook Voice |
| T Olive | Portfolio Holder Strategic Planning |

Also present (for some or all the meeting)

Councillor Bethany Collins
Councillor Roy Collins
Councillor Peter Faithfull
Councillor Paula Fernley
Councillor Steve Gazzard
Councillor Mike Goodman
Councillor Kevin Blakey

Also present:

Officers:

Matthew Blythe, Assistant Director Environmental Health
Tim Child, Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation
Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer
Simon Davey, Director of Finance
Will Dommett, District Ecologist
Naomi Harnett, Corporate Lead (Interim) – Major Projects & Programmes
Tracy Hendren, Chief Executive
Charles Plowden, Assistant Director Countryside and Leisure
John Symes, Finance Manager
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Andrew Wood, Director of Place
Mike O'Mahony, Senior Leisure Officer
Frances Wadsley, Project Manager, Planning, Growth, Development & Prosperity

Chair

Date:

Recommendations for Cabinet that will resolve in an action being taken:

Scrutiny Committee 7 November 2024

Minute 26 Climate Change report

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

1. That Cabinet note the progress made in achieving the actions specified in the Climate Change Action Plan 2020 – 2040.
2. That Cabinet consider the lessons learnt and how these can be applied to the development of the next Climate Change Action Plan.
3. That all Members be included in the development of the Climate Change Strategy going forward and that SWEEG be brought in to provide technical information and expertise to assist Members.

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 7 November 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.44 pm

19 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 July 2024 were agreed and signed as a true record.

20 Apologies

Cllr Joe Whibley had sent apologies for the meeting and had requested a short statement to be read out on his behalf. The Democratic Services Officer read the statement which expressed Cllr Whibley's concern at the inappropriateness of asking 15 Members of the Committee, plus Officers, to drive across the District to attend a meeting to discuss climate change targets. Cllr Whibley considered that a virtual meeting would have been more appropriate to reduce impact on the environment.

21 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

22 Public speaking

A member of the public, Mrs Anne Membery, had registered to speak but was unable to attend in person. Mrs Membery had submitted a statement which was read out by the Democratic Services Officer.

The statement questioned whether the fees paid to the consultants, WSP, to produce the 10 year strategic plan for Exmouth were justified. Mrs Membery considered that the strategic plan contained suggestions for Exmouth which were not feasible. Mrs Membery had also made a statement at the meeting of the Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront Group on 9 September 2024 and had been advised that the matter has gone to consultation.

Mrs Membery requested that the online consultation be scrutinised as it was difficult to complete and asked how many people had completed the consultation, and when the results would be made known.

A response had been provided by the Corporate Lead, Major Projects and Programmes and was read out by the Democratic Services Officer.

The response advised that the Exmouth Placemaking Plan was currently being reviewed internally and that this would include the deliverability and consideration of the funding for each of the projects. This work would be considered by the Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront Group in the next 3 to 4 months.

The consultants, WSP, were engaged following a formal procurement exercise, as the Council does not have the necessary in-house expertise for the extensive technical work involved. Costs are carefully monitored to ensure value for money.

With regards to the consultation, Officers work with communications colleagues to ensure that consultations are accessible and Officer support is available for respondents who are finding it difficult to engage.

23 **Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency.

24 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no confidential / exempt items.

25 **Decisions made by Cabinet called in by Members for scrutiny in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules**

There were no decisions made by Cabinet called in by Members for scrutiny.

26 **Climate change report**

The Portfolio Holder, Climate Action, was unable to attend the meeting but had submitted a written statement which was read out by the Democratic Services Officer.

The statement included the following points:

- 2024 is the final year of the original Climate Change Strategy,
- The Climate Change Team had been reviewing the strategy for 2025 onwards to ensure that the related Action Plan would deliver the required carbon reductions,
- The Carbon Descent Plan [attached to the report] had been produced in partnership with the South West Energy and Environment Group (SWEEDG) and provides a theoretical road map to reduce carbon emissions by 2040,
- SWEEDG met with all EDDC services in 2024 and this work is integral to the on-going review of both the Strategy and the Action Plan,
- 79% of EDDC emissions relate to 2 areas: the Council's housing stock and procurement,
- Comparisons with other authorities can be misleading: some councils fail to include scope 3 emissions in their calculations. The report noted that removing scope 3 emissions would show an approximate reduction of 20% from 2018 – 2024, however, the result would be disingenuous and, therefore, this approach had not been adopted by EDDC,
- Table 1 of the report summarises delivery to date and the Portfolio Holder was pleased to note that 67% had either been completed, or was on-going. No actions had been assessed as not achieved and 10% were no longer relevant,
- Section 4 of the report highlighted significant achievements during the plan period and the Climate Change Officer and services were thanked for their work in delivering such a wide range of results,
- The recruitment of a Climate Change Manager was welcome as all services continue to implement the changes needed to move towards the Council's net zero goal.

The Assistant Director, Environmental Health, introduced the report which provided a review of the Climate Change Action Plan 2020 – 2040 and looked at actions achieved and impact on carbon emissions. Key points covered in the presentation included:

- The current position with regard to carbon emissions between the years 2020/21 and 2023/24, showing an increase in emissions arising from procurement. It was noted that carbon emissions are allocated to procurement solely based on cost,
- Carbon footprint excluding social housing and scope 3 emissions,
- A review of the 82 actions in the Action Plan,
- An explanation of the Carbon Descent Plan carried out with SWEEG at the end of 2023, which is the basis of the new draft strategy and will underpin the next Action Plan,
- The findings of and actions arising from the Carbon Descent Plan,
- The theoretical carbon descent, should all the measures in the Carbon Descent Plan be implemented,
- Key achievements across the Council's services,
- Lessons learnt including the fact that carbon reduction has been inconsistent despite the Action Plan being followed and, most notably, that SMART targets had not previously been set,
- Moving forward SMART targets would be set alongside annual reporting to the Scrutiny Committee.

In response to a question from a Councillor unable to attend, the Assistant Director, Environmental Health, confirmed that, going forwards, Members could be involved directly in working with SWEEG.

Responses to Members' questions, and discussion, included the following points:

- Regarding establishing the carbon footprint of the Council's housing stock, the Council does not collect data from residents, but uses industry standard data, accessed by SWEEG, on which to base assumptions as to energy usage,
- It was noted that the calculation of carbon footprint for procurement is based on cost and that this is a blunt measurement tool, however, the calculations are adjusted for inflation,
- Setting up a scheme to sell credits is expensive and complex and it takes a long time before credits have any value. This could be considered again at a future date,
- Properties were chosen for decarbonisation based on the least efficient and costly properties to be dealt with first. A mix of measures was used including air source heat pumps, solar panels, replacement doors and windows,
- The private sector housing team carries out extensive outreach work to provide advice to residents, advice is also available on the website and through Exeter Community Energy,
- It will be important to provide accurate year on year comparisons going forward as measurement of emissions, such as through procurement, becomes more sophisticated and accurate,
- Additional EV chargers are to be installed at Blackdown House and on-street for those residents who do not have a driveway,
- Concern was expressed as to the need to spend money in the best way to decarbonise Council housing stock,
- There was a request for a Portfolio team to fully discuss and consider climate change issues in greater depth outside of formal Committee meetings,
- Members would welcome greater involvement with SWEEG,
- It would not be possible legally to insist that Council tenants source their energy from green suppliers,
- Council tenants could be encouraged to provide information as to the benefits they are experiencing following decarbonisation of their properties and information and advice could be shared with tenants regarding green energy suppliers and any cost savings available,
- It was noted that it is difficult to quantify the impact on carbon reduction by planting more trees due to the many variables involved, however, the Climate Change Officer would speak to SWEEG with regard to the data available,
- It is important to know the size of the tree canopy rather than the number of new trees planted in order to know whether green spaces are being properly protected and maintained and this is being addressed in the new Tree Strategy,
- Concern was expressed that easy to achieve measures are not being implemented,

- Installation of smart meters in Council properties would assist the resident and the Council at no cost to EDDC, although it was noted that smart meters can prove to be contentious, in part due to misinformation,
- Concern was expressed that trees planted on new developments are not properly protected and so are less likely to survive,
- It was noted that the calculation of carbon counting is very complex where 3rd party suppliers or contractors are involved,
- Enforcement of rain water harvesting could be considered as part of the Local Plan process,
- There was concern that reports to Cabinet do not quantify climate change impacts and only state whether the risk is medium or high, but without detailing the risk,

Members were requested to email any further questions or ideas to the Assistant Director, Environmental Health.

It was agreed:

1. That the Scrutiny Committee note the progress made in achieving the actions specified in the Climate Change Action Plan 2020 – 2040.
2. That the Scrutiny Committee note the lessons learnt and how these can be applied to the development of the next Climate Change Action Plan.
3. To request that all Members be included in the development of the Climate Change Strategy going forward and that SWEEG be brought in to provide technical information and expertise to assist Members.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

1. That Cabinet note the progress made in achieving the actions specified in the Climate Change Action Plan 2020 – 2040.
2. That Cabinet consider the lessons learnt and how these can be applied to the development of the next Climate Change Action Plan.
3. That all Members be included in the development of the Climate Change Strategy going forward and that SWEEG be brought in to provide technical information and expertise to assist Members.

27 Verbal update on progress with Scrutiny Action Plan and member training

The Democratic Services Officer read out the update from the Democratic Services Manager on progress with the Scrutiny Action Plan and member training.

The following points in the Action Plan were highlighted:

- The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three scrutiny function Committees had met to discuss the Terms of Reference. The preferred option is to meet four times per year with other scrutiny work carried out through Task and Finish Forums and briefings. It is proposed to align the membership of the Overview Committee and Scrutiny Committee to 13 members. Revised Terms of Reference would be considered by the Constitution Working Group as part of its work programme,
- With regard to resources, a draft job description had been prepared for a Scrutiny Officer role, which was subject to the job evaluation process,
- Senior Officer support for the three scrutiny Committees was now in place,
- Scrutiny training for Members would be provided by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny on 28th November,
- Chairs and Vice-Chairs to meet quarterly to review the work programmes for each Committee, including increasing links with the Audit and Governance Committee,
- Cross party pre-meeting briefings would be arranged as and when required,
- Training for officers on scrutiny processes would be provided in January 2025,

- A new performance management system had now been procured which would assist with tracking outcomes and regular updates on Overview and Scrutiny Committee work would be included in the Councillor Newsletter.

The update would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

28 **Work programme**

The Chair noted that not enough items for scrutiny were being submitted to add to the work programme. Members were requested to complete a scrutiny proposal form so that the Committee could consider whether to add items to its work programme.

It was noted that a scoping report is still required for consideration of the Exmouth sea wall item, and further information is required as to whether a South West Water Sewage TaFF is still appropriate, given the Devon wide involvement in this matter.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

I Barlow
K Bloxham
M Chapman
O Davey
M Goodman (Chair)
A Hall
M Hall
M Hartnell
V Johns
Y Levine
D Mackinder (Vice-Chair)
A Toye

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

R Collins
P Faithfull
N Hookway

Officers in attendance:

Matthew Blythe, Assistant Director Environmental Health
Catherine Causley, Climate Change Officer
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Catrin Stark, Director of Housing and Health
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Councillor apologies:

J Brown
J Heath
J Whibley

Chairman

Date:

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Asset Management Forum held online on 2 December 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 9.32 am and ended at 10.40 am

10 Notes from the previous meeting held on 17 June 2024

The notes from the previous meeting on the 17 June 2024 were agreed.

11 Declarations of interest

Minute 15

Cllr O Davey: ANRI Exmouth Town Council member

Cllr I Barlow: ANRI Sidmouth Town Council member

Cllr M Goodman: ANRI Sidmouth Town Council member

12 Public speaking

None.

13 Matters of urgency

None.

14 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None.

15 Estates Team update

The Estates Team update report covered:

- Recent event to celebrate 25 years of the East Devon Business Centre
- Re-let of two units at Riverside Workshops, Seaton
- Preparing of assets for auction in early 2025
- Completed acquisition of additional 18 acres of land at Seaton Marshes
- Additional resource secure to complete work on the draft Asset Management Plan in the New Year;
- Continued work on the disposal of Category B and C public toilets.

The Forum were also advised that a demonstration of the Asset Register software would be provided at a future meeting.

Discussion included:

- A positive meeting had taken place between the directors of the Norman Lockyer Observatory and officers in the past few days;
- Recent toilet closures had been necessary due to the invasive nature of the asbestos inspections, and liaison with Streetscene would continue to bring the toilets back into use as soon as possible.

The Forum noted the report.

16 **Place Major Projects & Programmes Team Update**

The update report included:

- Depots Review
- Public toilets, Esplanade & Drill Hall, Sidmouth
- UKSPF Feasibility Studies, Exmouth
- Stalled Employment Sites in Axminster, Honiton and Seaton
- Seaton Moridunum
- Clyst Meadows Country Park
- Cranbox, Cranbrook

Discussion covered:

- The size and scale of the Depot Review meant that a report could not be ready for Cabinet consideration until spring 2025;
- Planning application for the Clyst Meadows Country Park was now in for consideration by the Council this month;
- Modular space in Cranbrook was still under evaluation.

The Forum noted the report.

17 **Property and FM Team update**

The Forum received an update report covering the period June 2024 to October 2024; the report also set out the findings of the SWAP audit on corporate health and safety. The actions resulting from the audit were all priority 3 (priority 1 being the most urgent) and overall gave a high level of assurance that the Council was meeting its obligations.

Discussion included:

- The due diligence and dedication of the team in dealing with the work, particularly in balancing the demand of reactive work, was commended;
- The next stages of the toilet review would demand considerable time and resources;
- Any additional spend for projects that was not included in the budget (including capital projects that required additional funding) would come before Cabinet for approval. A request was made for future reporting to the Forum to include evaluation of the capital projects completed to establish the level meeting budget, under budget or reaching overspend;
- Spend on LED run assets was approximately at 40% of the total the Council covered, and communications should be considered to inform the public of the public spend to support the service.

The Forum noted the report.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

P Arnott

P Hayward (Chair)

G Jung

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow
O Davey
M Goodman
N Hookway

Officers in attendance:

Tim Child, Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation
Naomi Harnett, Corporate Lead (Interim) – Major Projects & Programmes
Alison Hayward, Project Manager Place & Prosperity
Jorge Pineda-Langford, Principal Building Surveyor, Property & FM

Councillor apologies:

S Hawkins
T Olive

Chair

Date:

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront Group held at Online via the Zoom app on 10 December 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.05 am

11 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 September 2024

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 September 2024 were noted as a true and accurate record.

12 Declarations of interest

Cllr N Hookway – Minutes 16-17; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Member of Exmouth Town Council.

Cllr O Davey – Minutes 16-17; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Member of Exmouth Town Council.

Cllr M Hall – Minutes 16-17; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Member of Exmouth Town Council.

13 Public speaking

One member of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

Mrs Ann Membery commented on the Exmouth Placemaking Plan Delivery Strategy Chart and offered views on public consultation and the ideas set out within the plan, challenging whether the money spent on consultancy was justified. She expressed concern at the time it was taking for the Council to go through due process before changes were made to the town and seafront. Mrs Membery further remarked that details of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Feasibility Studies should be made public and added that developments to the Queen Drive Space should include all-weather attractions, affordable to all members of the public.

The Chair thanked Mrs Membery for her contribution and responded that public consultations had taken place, the results from which could be republished. He reiterated that the Council must follow due legal process as recommended by Officers, and summarised the implications for the Council if it failed to do so. The Chair further outlined how the UKSPF was being spent, and expressed that he was supportive of the aspiration for affordable amenities on the seafront, for all residents and visitors to enjoy.

14 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

15 Confidential/exempt items

There was one confidential/exempt item (minute 17 refers).

16 **Exmouth Placemaking Plan Update**

The Corporate Lead – Major Projects and Programmes presented this report which updated members in regard to the work on the Placemaking Plan and the strategy to adoption, along with an overview of the current status in regard to the Queen's Drive Space and Beach Gardens.

The report was noted.

The meeting went into private session.

17 **Exmouth Phase 2 Seawall alignment and Stuart Lines Winch House Relocation**

The Engineering Projects Manager introduced this item and asked members to consider the report and provide feedback.

In discussion at length, members asked direct questions and offered views and feedback on the content of the report.

The Engineering Projects Manager also outlined plans to replace some sets of steps on the seafront, and members discussed the most feasible and affordable options.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

P Arnott (Vice-Chair)
O Davey
A Hall
M Hall
N Hookway (Chair)
G Deasy (Exmouth Town Council)

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow
G Jung

Officers in attendance:

Marie Ainsworth, Place & Prosperity Officer
Tom Buxton-Smith, Engineering Projects Manager
Tim Child, Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation
Ed Freeman, Assistant Director Planning Strategy and Development Management
Naomi Harnett, Corporate Lead (Interim) – Major Projects & Programmes
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Anne Mountjoy, Growth Point Communications Officer
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Rachel Papworth, Interim Project Manager
Katie Webb, Property Lawyer
Andrew Wood, Director of Place

Also in attendance (for some of the meeting)

Olly Swayne, LED CEO

Councillor apologies:

T Dumper

Chair:

Date:

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Exmouth Beach Management Plan Steering Group held at online via zoom on 23 October 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.19 pm

1 Introductions

Councillor Geoff Jung of East Devon District Council chaired this meeting of the Group.

Cllr Jung welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2 Beach Management Plan progress to date

Alan Frampton from South West Flood & Coastal, client project manager for the Beach Management Plan (BMP), updated the Group on progress to date, alongside Paul Norton from AECOM who is the consultant project manager.

As a reminder, the process for development and implementation of the BMP were:

- Stage 1 – data collation and review
- Stage 2 – Establishing the baseline scenario, including review of previous 2015 BMP
- Stage 3 – Future Management Regime Appraisal, including statutory environment assessments and 12 week public consultation
- Stage 4 – Reporting to the Group and seeking formal approval by EDDC's Cabinet

Discussion on this update included:

- Members recognised the volatility of sand levels on the beach, particularly evident following recent storms.
- It was difficult to conclude from the analysis that there was a definite trend of beach loss, or to identify exactly where and when to intervene.
- Approaches to addressing the aforementioned volatility included putting in place a solid structure to protect the sea wall, or using best endeavours to maintain beach levels and using those as a means of defence.

3 Presentation and discussion on draft proposed leading options

The Group received [a presentation](#) on the emerging options from the work to date for the BMP.

The presentation set out three options, summarised the basis of selection, and outlined the relevant considerations, benefits and risks associated with each option. It went on to summarise the funding and affordability of the respective options, highlighting indicative shortfalls of between £18 million and £23 million for the two leading options or £2 million for the backup option.

The three options included:

1. National Economic Leading Option – Seawall Encasement with Setback Floodwall. This was the most cost-beneficial option and would significantly reduce risk of coastal erosion and flooding; however, the amenity value of the beach could be lost in the long-term.
2. Local Aspirational Leading Option – Beach Nourishment with Groynes and Setback Floodwall. This option would control beach levels and retain the amenity value and wider

benefits of the beach. It could require a setback floodwall to provide protection from sea level rise.

3. Backup Option – Patch Repair to seawall. This option was similar to the current management approach and would delay the need for larger capital intervention but flood risk would remain, beach material could be lost during storms and the option was not a long term sustainable solution.

Questions and discussions on the options included:

- Challenges around financial viability were not unusual with projects of this nature but it was necessary to know the strategic vision, in order to raise the funding to realise the vision.
- The long term nature of the project was discussed, looking at a 10-year horizon until any works were carried out.
- It was suggested to contact David Reed MP concerning funding for this work, to ask for his assistance in lobbying government so as not to place an unfair burden on local Council Tax payers. The Chair commented that he had tried to make contact but had not received a response to date.
- The Council could consider incorporating one of the options into the wider Placemaking agenda in Exmouth, possibly providing some efficiencies and opportunities.
- Of the options available, groynes would be more expensive but would maintain a beach. A great deal of design effort and modelling would be necessary using the most advanced available modelling techniques to best replicate the complicated dynamics of the estuary system in order to get the groynes system right. A set back wall could be added at later date in the event of rising sea levels and increased flooding; this would involve the loss of some of the promenade.
- Measures would need to be in place to ensure that groynes did not create a hazard for lifeboats launching from the lifeboat station. This would include modelling to work out the layout of the groynes in interaction with the lifeboat, and a navigation marker on each groyne above the tide level, for visibility.
- In considering the potential loss of some of the promenade, some members were of the view that the cycle path along the seafront was unsafe and needed to be relocated and therefore ought not, in its current location, to be a consideration for this Group in reviewing the proposed leading options. Other members expressed the importance of keeping the existing cycle path at least until such time as an alternative was in place. It was noted that the cycle path was the responsibility of DCC Highways.
- If the objective was to stop erosion and secure the wider town from flood risk, then the National Economic Leading Option – Seawall Encasement with Setback Floodwall would be appropriate; however, it was likely this would be at the sacrifice of the beach as an amenity, in the longer term.
- Members were generally of the view that loss of the beach as an amenity would not be favourable. The beach was important for the town, bringing in a large number of visitors and trade, attracting visitors and giving the economic driver that the town needs. The members therefore widely favoured the Local Aspirational Leading Option as an attractive option which would maintain beach levels and the amenity value.

Alan Frampton set out next steps including environmental assessments for comment by statutory consultees Natural England and the Environment Agency, this to be carried out in parallel with the consultation on the leading options presented.

4 **Public consultation commencing November 2024**

Public consultation was due to run from 4th November 2024 to 27th January 2025*. The consultation would comprise:

- A drop-in engagement event for members of the public to find out more about the draft leading options on Tuesday 12th November 2024, 2pm – 7pm at Exmouth Town Hall.
- Online survey to capture feedback.

- Hard copies will be available to collect from Exmouth Town Hall.

*Post meeting amendment: Following this steering group meeting, it was found to be necessary to delay the start of the consultation period by 2 weeks. The revised consultation period is to be 18th November 2024 to 10th February 2025. Consequently, the drop-in event has been moved from 12th to 26th November, 2pm – 7pm at Exmouth Town Hall.

Attendance List

G Jung (Chair)
M Rixson
N Hookway
T Dumper
A Hall
O Davey

Also attending:

Alan Frampton, BCP
Chetna Jones, Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Pauline Stott, Exmouth Town Council
John Morgan, Exmouth Watersports
Cllr Christine Channon, Devon County Council
Paul Norton, Aecom
Martin Davies, Environment Agency

Officers in attendance:

Tom Buxton-Smith, Engineering Projects Manager
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Hancock, Assistant Director StreetScene

Apologies:

Max Underhill, RNLI

Chair

Date:

Recommendations for Cabinet that will resolve in an action being taken:

**Joint meeting of the Overview Committee and Scrutiny Committee 10
December 2024**

Minutes 34 – 38 Key Directorate Plan Objectives 2025-2026

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET:

That Cabinet approves the Directorate Plans for 2024 – 2028 for the Housing and Health, Place, Finance and Governance Directorates.

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committee and Overview Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 10 December 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 5.32 pm and ended at 7.46 pm

29 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 January 2024

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

30 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

31 Public speaking

No members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

32 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

33 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential/exempt items.

34 Key Directorate Plan Objectives 2025-2026

The Chief Executive introduced this item and advised that the Directorate Plans had been aligned directly to the Council Plan, as agreed by all Members, and which covers the next four years. Directorate Plans 2024 - 2028 included the service level objectives which set out how the objectives within the Directorate would be delivered during the period April 2025 – March 2026.

The Director of Finance advised that the Directorate Plans and the draft budget align currently, so that the funding available aligns with the Directorate Plans which are before the Committees for consideration. Any changes recommended by the Committees would require a corresponding change to the draft budget.

35 Housing and Health

The Director of Housing and Health presented the Housing and Health Directorate Plan 2024 – 28. The plan provided a high-level overview of the services across the Directorate. Key to the delivery of the plan was on-going communication and working with other Directorates. The Plan had been produced using a person centred, trauma informed perspective.

The Assistant Director Environmental Health introduced the services delivered by Environmental Health and how they support delivery of the Council Plan.

The Assistant Director Housing Regulated Services introduced the areas of delivery covered by this service. As with the Environmental Health service, a person centred, trauma informed approach provided a golden thread running through service delivery.

Questions, clarification and responses included the following points:

- Regarding communications software, the new corporate performance management system would improve communications. Work was also on-going to ensure that the right people are involved at the right time to ensure good cross-service communications.
- With regard to the suggested demolition of unused district-wide garages which are in disrepair to provide sites for affordable homes, it was noted that this is part of a larger piece of work across the Directorate. The feasibility and affordability of this suggestion would have to be considered as part of the wider long-term asset management strategy and set alongside other priorities. This work cannot be done in isolation and would take time.
- Manual systems and checks are in place to enable Home Safeguard to support vulnerable people. It was proposed to hold a workshop to explain the detail of how Home Safeguard works, and this could also cover how the system operates in the event of a power failure.
- A workshop could be arranged to enable Members to better understand how the Devon Home Choice application system works.
- It was noted that there needs to be sufficient flexibility within the four year Directorate Plan to take account of the impact of uncertainties in the wider world. There is a need to work in an agile and responsive way which includes horizon scanning. The Directorate Plan is a living document which will respond to both operational needs and longer-term external influences.
- With regard to the four year budget required to deliver the Directorate Plan, the Medium Term Financial Plan looks ten years ahead, however, it was acknowledged that there is uncertainty in the wider public finance and plans would have to react to any future changes in local government finance.
- Work is on-going to set appropriate performance targets [Section 3 of the Directorate Plan]. With regards to the Environmental Health service, some of the work is business as usual so that targets would not be appropriate. The formal document containing agreed performance targets would be signed-off in the new year.
- Quarterly performance would be reported to the Housing Review Board going forward.

The Chair thanked the Director of Housing and Health and her team for attending the meeting and for the comprehensive and excellent Directorate Plan.

36 **Place**

The Director of Place presented the Place Directorate Plan 2024 – 2028. Formed relatively recently, the Directorate brings together four key service areas which work together to deliver the Council Plan. The Director highlighted key areas for service delivery moving forward.

The Assistant Director Countryside & Leisure introduced key areas of work for the ecology, trees and countryside teams and emphasised the need for partnership working with other organisations. The Assistant Director also highlighted key priorities for culture service delivery.

The Assistant Director Planning & Development Management introduced key projects including developing a talent management strategy and greater engagement with town and parish councils. Delivery of services and infrastructure at Cranbrook remained a priority.

The Assistant Director Place & Assets outlined key priorities for the service area: establishing an assertive delivery model for the second new town; placemaking for towns; developing and implementing a new asset management plan.

Questions, clarification and responses included the following:

- Concern was expressed regarding the effectiveness of planning enforcement. Scrutiny of this area would be discussed to determine the most appropriate way of addressing the concerns. The review of systems and processes of planning enforcement was included in the service plan for the coming year.
- Delivery of the Tourism Strategy continues to be a key piece of work for the service.
- A rolling programme of replacement and renewal of children's play parks is included in the investment plan for the year.
- Concern was expressed regarding the additional capacity requirements for the District Heating Network. It was noted that the District Heating Stakeholder Forum had been established previously to address such concerns. The project design had allowed for scaling up of capacity to deal with future expansion and development.
- Concerns regarding the safeguarding of ancient woodland would be addressed by the Strategic Planning Committee as part of its consideration of the new Local Plan.
- The Regulation 19 version of the new Local Plan has to include the Master Plan for the proposed new community and it was confirmed that the timeframe for the Master Plan, as stated in the Directorate Plan, would be met.
- Concern was expressed regarding the need for a step change in provision of planning enforcement, particularly given the proposed development of the second new town. It was noted that a step change would only be achieved through increasing staff capacity, which may not be a realistic option, however, the planned review of enforcement systems and processes would provide a good starting point in delivering a better service.
- Regarding potential changes to local government structures, it was noted that there is a high level of complexity and ambiguity currently. It was hoped that the imminent devolution white paper would provide some clarity. It was crucial for the Council to work collaboratively with its peers and partners going forward.
- With regard to the delivery of the proposed second new community, it was noted that the delivery plan would be bold, having learnt lessons from the delivery of Cranbrook.

The Chair thanked the Director and his team for attending and for their excellent and comprehensive Directorate Plan.

37 **Finance**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the Directorate Plan 2024 – 2028. The key objective for the Directorate is to get the basics right to enable delivery of the Council Plan. The Portfolio Holder highlighted the anti-poverty work and council tax collection rates as examples where the Council is a leading local authority.

The Director of Finance noted that the Customer Charter is a key piece of work led by the Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services. Work is also on-going to deliver the Fraud Strategy and to set a balanced budget for 2025 – 26. Members would be kept informed and involved as further Government changes are announced. Concern was noted regarding issues around auditing and audit opinion on the Council's accounts.

Questions, clarification and responses included the following points:

- Council tax charges for second home ownership have now been included in the Council tax base. The tax base has now been notified to town and parish councils.

- The over-complicated nature of local council accounts is recognised as a national risk with a very small number of companies qualified to undertake audits. There is a need to change the way local authority accounts are produced rather than just draw a line and start again which could result in another backlog in the future.
- With regard to increases in fees charged by the Council, a fees and charges schedule is being produced to accompany the draft budget. There will be areas where the Council can maximise revenue to support service delivery.
- Where an owner has multiple properties which are rented out, these would fall under business rates rather than second home ownership. The Council has systems in place to detect fraud and substantiate home ownership to identify second home owners liable for Council tax.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and Director of Finance for the Directorate Plan.

38 **Governance**

The Director of Governance presented the Governance Directorate Report 2024 – 2028. Key areas of work include a review of the Constitution, development of the People Strategy, embedding the new corporate performance and risk system, reviewing leadership and management development, roll-out of Sharepoint, County Council elections, Community Governance Review for Cranbrook and improved engagement with town and parish councils.

Questions, clarification and responses included the following points:

- Regarding the Community Governance Review for Cranbrook, which also affects neighbouring parishes, concern was expressed that the April 2026 target date is too late and should be brought forward. The Director for Governance recognised the importance of the Review and advised that certain legal changes can only take effect in April of any year. The Review would be conducted as soon as possible although some changes can only come into effect in April 2026 at the earliest.
- There was concern that positive messages are not being communicated sufficiently to residents.
- Regarding training for town and parish councillors following an election, there should be a balance between training provided by the Devon Association of Local Councils as the primary provider, and supplementary training provided by EDDC in a supporting role.
- It was noted that new laptops which do not use the global desktop are currently being trialled.

The Leader of the Council wished to record his thanks to the Housing Directorate for the work they are undertaking to improve the Council's housing stock and service. Historic difficulties within the service have already been acknowledged and there is a need to clearly communicate with residents where improvements are now being made.

The Chair wished to record his thanks to the Management Information Officer for her hard work in compiling the Directorate Plans and in making improvements in the reporting of performance information.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET:

That Cabinet approves the Directorate Plans for 2024 – 2028 for the Housing and Health, Place, Finance and Governance Directorates.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

I Barlow
K Bloxham
J Brown
M Chapman
M Goodman (Chair)
A Hall (Vice-Chair)
M Hall
J Heath
V Johns
Y Levine
D Mackinder
A Bailey
B Bailey
K Blakey
P Fernley
M Martin
D Wilson

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
C Brown
R Collins
S Hawkins
N Hookway
B Ingham
D Ledger
J Loudoun
T Olive
M Rixson

Officers in attendance:

Jo Avery, Management Information Officer
Matthew Blythe, Assistant Director Environmental Health
Tim Child, Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation
Simon Davey, Director of Finance
Ed Freeman, Assistant Director Planning Strategy and Development Management
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Assistant Director Housing (Tenancy Services)
Tracy Hendren, Chief Executive
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew King, Interim Assistant Director for Housing (Regulated Services)
Charles Plowden, Assistant Director Countryside and Leisure
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Andrew Wood, Director of Place
Naomi Harnett, Corporate Lead (Interim) – Major Projects & Programmes

Councillor apologies:

O Davey
A Toye
J Whibley

Chair

Date:

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Cranbrook Placemaking Group held at Conference Room, Younghayes Centre, Cranbrook on 18 November 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 9.30 am and ended at 10.31 am

20 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 September 2024

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Cranbrook Placemaking Group held on 16 September 2024 were agreed.

21 Apologies

Apologies received from Councillor Kevin Blakey and Sam Hawkins.

22 Declarations of Interest

None.

23 Public speaking

None.

24 Matters of urgency

None.

25 Confidential / exempt items

None.

26 Cranbrook Town Centre

The Group received a report confirming that the Strategic Planning Committee had endorsed the Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan at their meeting on 29 October 2024.

It was noted that the masterplan ensured there was a coordinated approach to the delivery of the public buildings in the town centre and that individual projects were managed as part of an overarching programme.

It was acknowledged that having a coordinated approach to the delivery of additional development in the town centre was important for the vitality and vibrancy of the town and to ensure the right facilities were brought forward to support the growing community.

The Group received an update and noted the following:

- Work to transfer Parcel TC2 progressing.
- Health provision – location identified
- Sport facility – successful funding bid from Sport England

The Group recognised the importance of the governance arrangements for the masterplan and it was noted that the Group would receive details of how East Devon District Council and Devon County Council would work together on the masterplan with an update being presented to the next meeting in January 2025.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Cranbrook Placemaking Group note the endorsement of the Town Centre Masterplan by the Strategic Planning Committee
2. That the Cranbrook Placemaking Group note the establishment of a programme to provide coordination and oversight of individual town centre projects.

27 **Cranbox**

The Group received a verbal update and during consideration the following was noted:

- Dedicated EDDC resources now in place
- Funding – draft agreement in preparation

RESOLVED:

That the update on Cranbox was noted.

28 **Cranbrook public transport and movement**

The Group received a verbal update on the Cranbrook public transport and movement and during consideration noted the following:

- Timing for improved public transport links and parking
- Priority for cyclists and pedestrians minimising facilities for car usage
- Route expansion to railway station

The Group agreed to invite a representative from Devon County Council to submit a report to a future meeting setting out the priorities for public transport, cycling and pedestrians including route viability for Cranbrook.

RESOLVED:

1. That the update was noted.
2. To invite a representative from Devon County Council to submit a report setting out the priorities for public transport, cycling and pedestrians including route viability for Cranbrook.

29 **Forward Plan**

The Group considered the Forward Plan covering the period up to June 2025.

RESOLVED:

That the Cranbrook Placemaking Group Forward Plan was noted.

30 **Implementation Plan**

The Group received the Implementation Plan which set out the progress on a number of key actions and noted the update.

RESOLVED:

That the Implementation Plan was noted.

31 **Consortium Completions Programme**

The Group received a verbal update on the Consortium Completions Programme and requested that a representative from the Consortium was invited to the next Group meeting to discuss timescales for their activity.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Consortium Completions Programme was noted.
2. That a representative from the Consortium was invited to the next meeting to discuss timescales for their activity.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

K Bloxham (EDDC)

T Olive (EDDC)

H Gent (DCC)

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

A Bailey (EDDC)

B Bailey (EDDC)

Officers in attendance:

Thea Billeter, Cranbrook New Community Manager (EDDC)

Ed Freeman, Assistant Director Planning Strategy and Development Management (EDDC)

Naomi Harnett, Corporate Lead (Interim) – Major Projects & Programmes (EDDC)

Nicola Wilson, Principal Planning Officer (DCC)

Andrew Melhuish, Democratic Services Manager (EDDC)

Councillor apologies:

K Blakey

S Hawkins

Chair

Date:

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting 8 January 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



2025/2026 Council Tax Base

Report summary:

This report sets out the tax base for 2025/2026 and includes the breakdown for each parish, expressed in terms of Band D equivalent properties on which the council tax will be based. This is an important component in the Council's budget setting process for 2025/2026.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

1. That Cabinet agree the approval of the tax base for 2025/2026 at 65,142.52 Band D equivalent properties.
2. That Cabinet agrees the amount for each parish as detailed under section 3 of this report.

Reason for recommendation:

The calculation of the tax base is prescribed in regulations and is a legal requirement. The council tax base is defined as the number of Band D equivalent properties in a local authority's area. The tax base is necessary to calculate council tax for a given area.

Officer: Libby Jarrett, Service Lead for Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services & Corporate Fraud & Compliance ljarrett@eastdevon.gov.uk 01395 517450

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Economy
- ☒ Finance and Assets
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☒ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information [The Local Authorities \(Calculation of Council Tax Base\) \(England\) Regulations 2012 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
 - ☒ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☒ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services
-

Report in full

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The tax base for council tax must be set between 1 December 2024 and 31 January 2025.
- 1.2 The council tax base is the measure of the number of dwellings to which council tax is chargeable in an area or part of an area. It is used for the purposes of calculating an authority's band D council tax.
- 1.3 Regulations prescribe that the relevant date to be used in estimating the tax base will be 30 November in the financial year preceding that for which the tax base is calculated.
- 1.4 The tax base calculation is determined annually by identifying the number of properties listed in the valuation list and then adjusted for the following:
 - An estimate of the number of new properties to come on to the Valuation list for all or part of the year and the estimated level of discounts, exemptions and reliefs that may apply.
 - An estimate of the number of properties to be demolished and allowing for any discounts and exemptions associated with them.
 - The number of discounts, exemptions, premiums and reliefs
 - The estimated reduction for the council tax reduction scheme
 - The estimated collection rate for the year.
 - The Contribution in lieu from the Ministry of Defence (MoD properties are treated as exempt for council tax purposes and the MoD makes a contribution in lieu of council tax after deducting an allowance for periods when properties are empty).

2.0 Council Tax Base Calculation for 2025/2026

- 2.1 The table at 2.9 shows the number of properties (by band) in the Valuation list as at 30 November 2024 and then adjusted to reflect discounts, exemptions, premiums and reliefs, an estimate of new builds, deletions, appeals, council tax reduction scheme, collection rate and contribution from MoD.
- 2.2 The estimate for the council tax reduction scheme has been calculated based on our scheme remaining unchanged between 2024/2025 and 2025/2026.

- 2.3 The tax base takes account of existing discounts, and premiums and the current percentage levels which apply.
- 2.5 The Tax base allows for the additional premium that will be applied to second homes from 1 April 2025. A factor to take account of the statutory exceptions has been applied.
- 2.6 There are 431 (422.27 Band D equivalents) new properties that have been included to come on for the equivalent of the whole of next year. This is after adjustments for discounts, exemptions, number of days within the year, etc.
- 2.7 We have used a collection rate of 98.6% (previously 98.9%) to reflect estimated in year performance.
- 2.8 There are 152.79 Band D equivalent MoD properties which has been estimated taking into account the current contribution.

2.9 Totals for East Devon 2025/2026

| BAND | A* | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | Total |
|---|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|--------|-----------|
| 1. Properties in list | 0.00 | 6,851.00 | 14,113.00 | 17,786.00 | 13,622.00 | 11,369.00 | 6,695.00 | 4,268.00 | 207.00 | 74,911.00 |
| 2. Adjustments | 17.25 | -1,174.70 | -1,630.90 | -1,491.00 | -971.95 | -674.70 | -354.95 | -218.35 | -34.80 | -6,534.10 |
| 3. Plus New Builds | 0.00 | 33.00 | 56.00 | 149.00 | 89.00 | 78.00 | 22.00 | 4.00 | 0.00 | 431.00 |
| 4. Adjusted number of properties (Sub total of rows 1, 2 & 3) | 17.25 | 5,709.30 | 12,538.10 | 16,444.00 | 12,739.05 | 10,772.30 | 6,362.05 | 4,053.65 | 172.20 | 68,807.90 |
| 5. Less CTR | 4.00 | 1,251.00 | 2,087.00 | 1,428.00 | 436.00 | 178.00 | 45.00 | 12.00 | 0.00 | 5,441.00 |
| 6.Total equivalent properties | 13.25 | 4,458.30 | 10,451.10 | 15,016.00 | 12,303.05 | 10,594.30 | 6,317.05 | 4,041.65 | 172.20 | 63,366.90 |
| 7.Ratio to Band D | 5/9 | 6/9 | 7/9 | 8/9 | 9/9 | 11/9 | 13/9 | 15/9 | 18/9 | N/A |
| 8.Band D equivalent | 7.36 | 2,972.20 | 8,128.63 | 13,347.56 | 12,303.05 | 12,948.59 | 9,124.63 | 6,736.08 | 344.40 | 65,912.50 |
| 9. Collection Rate @ 98.6% 64,989.73 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10. Contribution for MOD properties 152.79 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11. Tax Base 65,142.52 | | | | | | | | | | |

Key

- 1 Properties in list - refers to the number of properties in each band shown in the Valuation list as at 30 November 2024 (A* = band A with a disablement discount).
- 2 Less adjustments for exemptions, disablement relief, discounts, premiums for empty home and second homes, etc
- 3 Newly built properties estimated to come onto Valuation list and adjusted for discounts, reliefs, etc.
- 4 Adjusted number of properties.
- 5 Less Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- 6 Total equivalent number of properties after all adjustments.
- 7 Band ratios as prescribed by legislation
- 8 Band D equivalent gives the totals in line 6 expressed in terms of band D.
- 9 Adjustment for assumed collection rate for 2025/2026.
- 10 The contribution from the Ministry of Defence adjusted to the number of Band D equivalent properties.
- 11 Tax Base for 2025/2026 in Band D equivalents

2.7 The tax base for 2025/2026 has increased by 2695.52 band D equivalent properties (62447 for the current year – 2024/2025).

2.8 The actual number of additional new properties on the Council Tax Valuation list (comparing 30 November 2023 to 30 November 2024) has increased by 740.

3.0 Parish/Town Tax Base for 2025/2026

3.1 The table below shows the tax base expressed as the number of Band D equivalent properties for each of the parish/towns after adjustments. The calculation for each of the towns and parishes is determined in the same way as set out in section 2 of this report.

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------|-------------------|-----------|-------------|----------|
| All Saints | 266.81 | Dalwood | 227.69 | Poltimore | 136.07 |
| Awliscombe | 253.22 | Dunkeswell | 625.22 | Rewe | 200.25 |
| Axminster | 2,948.28 | E.Budleigh/Bicton | 536.91 | Rockbeare | 384.32 |
| Axmouth | 278.15 | Exmouth | 13,731.58 | Seaton | 3,499.17 |
| Aylesbeare | 266.97 | Farringdon | 158.52 | Sheldon | 91.81 |
| Beer | 781.03 | Farway | 138.97 | Shute | 305.74 |
| Bishops Clyst | 619.36 | Feniton | 677.17 | Sidmouth | 7,345.67 |
| Bramford Speke | 156.00 | Gittisham | 484.17 | Southleigh | 114.46 |
| Branscombe | 396.55 | Hawkchurch | 288.13 | Stockland | 359.20 |
| Broadclyst | 2,936.94 | Honiton | 4,087.27 | Stoke Canon | 247.04 |
| Broadhembury | 342.99 | Huxham | 47.46 | Talaton | 253.09 |
| Buckerell | 119.41 | Kilminster | 408.97 | Uplyme | 938.93 |
| Budleigh Salterton | 2,994.31 | Luppitt | 231.33 | Upottery | 352.83 |
| Chardstock | 428.12 | Lympstone | 969.24 | Upton Pyne | 229.63 |
| Clyst Honiton | 119.60 | Membury | 299.34 | West Hill | 1,175.18 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|--------------------|------------------|
| Clyst Hydon | 135.18 | Monkton | 78.98 | Whimble | 746.41 |
| Clyst St George | 400.95 | Musbury | 262.30 | Widworthy | 148.96 |
| Clyst St Lawrence | 50.76 | Netherexe | 29.55 | Woodbury | 1,462.65 |
| Colaton Raleigh | 324.96 | Newton Poppleford | 984.23 | Yarcombe | 242.51 |
| Colyford | 443.96 | Northleigh | 90.95 | | |
| Colyton | 1,084.32 | Offwell | 189.50 | | |
| Combe Raleigh | 109.84 | Otterton | 335.73 | | |
| Combpyne-Rousdon | 224.67 | Ottery St Mary | 3,016.53 | | |
| Cotleigh | 108.67 | Payhembury | 345.95 | | |
| Cranbrook | 2,614.32 | Plymtree | 257.54 | | |
| | | | | Grand total | 65,142.52 |

Financial implications:

This calculation gives us and other preceptors the taxbase in order to levy council tax in 20025/26.

Legal implications:

This report has been produced in accordance with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012.

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting 8 January 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26

Report summary:

To consider and approve the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme for 2025/26 which we are recommending is not changed from the 2024/25 scheme. This is because our current scheme continues to support low-income households in the most effective way in the current economic climate.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

To recommend to Council that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working age residents is approved for 2025/26.

Reason for recommendation:

The council is required by law to decide whether to revise or replace its CTR scheme each year. The proposal is that the scheme remains unchanged from 2024/25 as the current economic climate remains difficult for those on low incomes. Leaving the scheme as it is, will ensure that those households on the lowest income and therefore falling into income band 1 would continue to receive 100% support towards their Council Tax charge.

Officer: Sharon Church, Benefits and Financial Resilience Manager, schurch@eastdevon.gov.uk
01395 571791

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Economy
- ☒ Finance and Assets
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☒ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact High Impact

An [Equalities Impact Assessment](#) has been undertaken but as we are not making any changes to our scheme the impact is neutral.

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ A supported and engaged community
- ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☒ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services

1. Background

- 1.1 Council Tax Reduction (CTR) was introduced from 1 April 2013 when it replaced the national Council Tax Benefit scheme. It is a means tested reduction/discount for council taxpayers who are on a low income.
- 1.2 Working Age applicants for CTR have a scheme that is determined by local policy whilst pension age applicants are determined by national scheme subject to prescribed legislation.
- 1.3 Every year the Council is required to review and agree the working age scheme by 11 March of the preceding financial year. Any changes made to a working age CTR scheme are subject to public consultation.
- 1.4 We have not made any changes to our CTR scheme since 1 April 2023. Out of the beneficial changes made to the scheme from April 2023 the biggest was to increase support for those in income band 1 (households on lowest income) from 85 to 100%.
- 1.5 Although we made the beneficial changes from April 2023, due to external factors such as the continued cost-of-living crisis we are aware that there are households still struggling to afford essentials and pay their Council Tax. Overall the Council Tax collection rates are showing a slight reduction compared to this time last year.

2. Current Scheme (including caseload)

- 2.1 Our current scheme is based on four income bands – 100%, 80%, 55% and 25%. When modelling this scheme in 2022 it was estimated that 65% of our previous caseload would either benefit or be unaffected by the changes that were introduced from 01 April 2023 provided the circumstances of claimants would remain the same.
- 2.2 The following table provides a breakdown of the number of claimants split between working and pensionable age and how the caseload has changed since April 2023:

| Caseload | As at April 2023 | As at October 2023 | As at April 2024 | As at October 2024 | Difference between Apr 23 & Oct 24 (% rise) |
|--------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|---|
| Working age | 4,561 | 4,516 | 4,528 | 4,539 | -22 (-0.48%) |
| Pension age | 3,546 | 3,513 | 3,455 | 3,465 | -81 (-2.28%) |
| Total | 8,107 | 8,029 | 7,983 | 8,004 | -103 (-1.27%) |

- Our working age caseload continues to reduce albeit slower than for the financial year 2022/23. The reduction for working age households claiming CTR for 2023/24 is at 0.48% compared to a reduction of 2.10% on year ending 2023. This would continue to suggest that many low-income households are still struggling to make ends meet.
- For those households of pensionable age, the reduction in caseload had a higher percentage decrease in the periods April to October 2023 (0.93%) and October 2023 to April 2024 (1.65%) than for the period April 2024 to October 2024 where an increase in the numbers receiving CTR have started to rise. This would suggest that work on the Benefit Take up campaign encouraging pensionable age residents to apply for support is starting to have an effect.

2.3 The following table provides the caseload broken down by the four discount bands:

| Band | October 2022 | October 2023 | October 2024 | 2022 to 2023 | % Change | 2023 to 2024 | % Change |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| 100% | 2,423 | 2004 | 1844 | -419 | -17.29% | -579 | -23.9% |
| 80% | 1,264 | 916 | 869 | -348 | -27.53% | -395 | -31.3% |
| 55% | 623 | 1194 | 1321 | +571 | +91.65% | +698 | +112% |
| 25% | 256 | 402 | 505 | +146 | +57.03% | +249 | +97.27% |
| Total | 4,566 | 4,516 | 4,539 | -50 | -1.09% | -27 | -0.59% |

- The majority of our caseload is within Income Band 1, however this has seen a reduction of 23.9% since October 2023.
- Income Band 2 (80%) has also seen a reduction of 31.3% compared to October 2023.
- Income Bands 3 (55%) and 4 (25%) have seen increases in the numbers of households receiving CTR with 112% rise for Band 3 and 97.27% rise for band 4. These rises are likely due to the 974 residents either no longer being entitled or falling out of Income Bands 1 and 2 due to increases in income following a change in circumstances such as returning to work.

2.4 The following table shows how the caseload continues to change across the characteristics of households where there are children, someone with a disability or someone who is in employment living in the household.

| Band | Households with Children | | | Disability Benefit | | | Employed | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| | Oct-23 | Dec-24 | % Diff | Oct-23 | Dec-24 | % Diff | Oct-23 | Dec-24 | % Diff |
| Band 1 100% | 809 | 671 | -17.06% | 989 | 906 | -8.39% | 141 | 134 | -4.96% |
| Band 2 80% | 607 | 610 | +0.5% | 402 | 405 | +0.75% | 486 | 406 | -16.46% |
| Band 3 55% | 521 | 601 | +15.36% | 531 | 645 | +21.5% | 600 | 646 | +7.67% |
| Band 4 25% | 244 | 349 | +43.00% | 101 | 145 | +43.6% | 381 | 440 | +15.5% |
| Total | 2181 | 2,231 | +2.29% | 2023 | 2,101 | +3.86% | 1608 | 1,626 | +1.12% |

Note: households can fall into more than one of the above categories

- The majority of households falling out of Income Band 1 are those where there are children resident in the household, followed by those households where there is a resident who is disabled living in the property.
- For Income Band 2 the majority of households falling into a lower band are those households where there is someone who is employed resident.

2.5 Our working age scheme continues to include an exceptional hardship fund (EHF) to help those households who still struggle to make up any shortfall in their entitlement. This allows us to provide additional support of up to 100% of the council tax charge. Cases are considered on a case-by-case basis and are dependant on the individual's needs. To date we have awarded approximately £6K under EHF which is included in the total costs of the scheme in 3.1.

3. Future Costs

3.1 The expenditure split of the scheme as at 7 October 2024 is shown in the table below.

| Claim type | Expenditure costs |
|--------------|--------------------|
| Working age | £5,165,284 |
| Pension age | £4,930,748 |
| Total | £10,096,032 |

3.2 Our working age CTR scheme allows for us to make amendments to the income band widths to take account of inflationary changes such as the annual increases in welfare benefits paid by the Department for Works and Pensions. As there will be a rise in the majority of welfare benefits of 1.7% CPI, we will be increasing our income bands to take account of this in order to minimise the number of households moving up/down a band. Where we may get instances of a small number of cases moving down a band, we can look to provide support via the Exceptional Hardship Fund which is part of the CTR scheme. They can also be supported by our Financial Resilience Team.

3.3 Costs of the 2024/25 will depend on a combination of factors that include the annual rise in Council Tax, the continued improvement in the economic recovery and the number of pensionable age residents who respond to the take up campaign.

3.4 The cost of the CTR scheme is funded through the Council Tax base, and costs are shared in proportion between the preceptors. For East Devon the CTR expenditure equates to 7% of the total cost.

4.0 Arrears

4.1 The following table gives details of those households who are receiving CTR as at 2 December 2024 against the numbers of households in arrears, further split into working and pensionable age.

| Total | | | Working Age | | | Pension Age | | |
|-------|------------|-------|-------------|------------|--------|-------------|------------|-------|
| Cases | In arrears | % | Cases | In Arrears | % | Cases | In arrears | % |
| 8030 | 683 | 8.51% | 4565 | 625 | 13.69% | 3465 | 58 | 1.67% |

- 8.51% of all CTR claims are in arrears. When comparing this against non CTR households in arrears the percentage is only 3.28%. This highlights that households on low incomes struggle more to pay Council Tax.
- 13.69% of working age residents receiving CTR are in arrears with their Council Tax accounts. In comparison to July 2022 the percentage of working age CTR cases in arrears was 19.7%, this demonstrates that our current scheme is helping to support low-income households.

4.2 The table below shows a breakdown of those cases in arrears where CTR is being received broken down into Council Tax bands.

| Band | Total CTR Cases in arrears | | | Working Age | | | Pension Age | | |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|------------|---------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| | Total CTR claims | CTR households | % | Total Cases | In arrears | % | Total Cases | In arrears | % |
| A | 1877 | 156 | 8.31% | 1152 | 141 | 12.24% | 725 | 15 | 2.07% |
| B | 3072 | 270 | 8.79% | 1747 | 244 | 13.97% | 1325 | 26 | 1.96% |
| C | 2095 | 199 | 9.50% | 1272 | 190 | 14.94% | 823 | 9 | 1.09% |
| D | 618 | 50 | 8.09% | 283 | 43 | 15.19% | 335 | 7 | 2.09% |
| E | 274 | 5 | 1.82% | 83 | 5 | 6.02% | 191 | 0 | 0% |
| F | 74 | 3 | 4.05% | 22 | 2 | 9.09% | 52 | 1 | 1.92% |
| G | 20 | 0 | 0% | 14 | 0 | 0% | 6 | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 8030 | 683 | 8.51% | 4565 | 625 | 13.69% | 3457 | 58 | 1.68% |

- Working age residents make up the highest percentage of arrears compared to those of pensionable age.
- The property band with the highest level of arrears is band D for both working age and pensionable age residents.

4.3 The following table shows the level of arrears spread across the income bands for working age cases.

| Income Band | Working age cases in arrears | | |
|--------------|------------------------------|------------|---------------|
| | Total cases | in arrears | % |
| 1 | 1777 | 197 | 11.09% |
| 2 | 917 | 146 | 15.92% |
| 3 | 1373 | 205 | 14.93% |
| 4 | 498 | 77 | 15.46% |
| Total | 4565 | 625 | 13.69% |

- Households receiving CTR and falling within Income Band 1 are no longer the highest group with arrears on their accounts as in previous years. This supports that raising this income band from 85% to 100% has had a positive effect on those with the lowest incomes.
- The highest levels of arrears are those in Income Bands 2 and 4.

5.0 Summary

- 5.1 Analysis of the data over the last 12 months suggest that households are returning to employment and no longer requiring 100% support from CTR.
- 5.2 The highest level of arrears is for those in Income Bands 2 and 4 followed by Income Band 3, suggesting that even though residents have started to return to work they are still struggling to afford to pay their Council Tax charge.
- 5.3 Since July 2022 the percentage of working age CTR cases in arrears has fallen. However, CTR working age residents are more likely to fall into arrears than those that are not receiving CTR. We will be undertaking more targeted work on these arrears' cases over the next financial year and offering those households who need help support from the Financial Resilience team.

Financial implications:

The implications have been factored into the taxbase for 2025/26 and therefore the draft budget.

Legal implications:

The legal issues are covered in the body of the report and the Scheme itself.

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 8 January 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets 2025/26

Report summary:

This report presents the draft revenue and capital budgets for 2025/26 for adoption by the Cabinet before consideration by a joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Housing Review Board.

Recommendations from these meetings will be presented back to Cabinet on 5th February 2025 when members will finalise budget proposals to recommend to Council.

This report has been compiled before the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement announcement on the 18th December, it can be confirmed that the outcome of the Settlement is in line with the estimates made in this report and no amendments are required.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That the draft revenue and capital estimates including the associated fees and charges schedule are adopted before forwarding to a joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Housing Review Board for consideration.

Reason for recommendation:

There is a requirement to set a balanced budget and a Council Tax for 2025/26

Officer: Simon Davey – Director of Finance S151 sdavey@eastdevon.gov.uk
 John Symes – Finance Manager DS151 jsymes@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☒ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☒ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☒ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☒ Communications and Democracy
- ☒ Economy
- ☒ Finance and Assets
- ☒ Strategic Planning
- ☒ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☒ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

An analysis of budget changes has not highlighted areas that give rise to any equality issues that need highlighting. There are no changes proposed from the current service provisions because of the draft budget that will affect individuals. [Equalities Impact Assessment](#)

Climate change Medium Impact

The budget approval gives the Council the resources necessary to undertake its business which will contribute to the carbon footprint of the Council. The Council is committed to reducing its carbon net emissions to zero by 2040 and resources have been factored into the budget to meet this priority including key actions identified in the Directorate Service Plans.

Risk: Medium Risk; Risks have been considered in preparing the budgets and the financial implications have been assessed at the point of preparation. Various budget assumptions have been made including the treatment of inflation and interest rates; estimates on the level and timing of capital receipts; the treatment of demand led pressures; the treatment of planned efficiency savings/productivity gains; levels of income; financial risks inherent in any new arrangements; capital developments; the availability of funds to deal with major contingencies and the need for any provisions. In each of these areas the Council's financial standing, management and track record have been considered to prepare robust budget proposals. Other specific areas of risk have been highlighted where appropriate within the report.

Links to background information [2025/26 Budget Book](#);
[Fees & Charges Schedule with proposed charges for 2025/26](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
- ☒ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☒ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services

1. Process

- 1.1 The Constitution requires Cabinet to approve the draft revenue and capital budget prior to consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Housing Review Board will undertake the same function in relation to the Housing Revenue Account budgets.
- 1.2 Recommendations from these meetings will be presented back to Cabinet at its meeting on 5th February, along with any comments from the business community. At this meeting members will be required to recommend to Council a budget and the Council Tax requirement for 2025/26.
- 1.3 Directorate Service Plans were prepared alongside the draft budget and brought forward for early consideration by a joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees on 10th December. Recommendations from this meeting are presented in the minutes to Cabinet on the agenda.

2. General Fund Budget

The Overall Financial Picture

- 2.1 The General Fund records day to day spending and income on the delivery for all Council services except for items relating to its Council House landlord function which is recorded in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and detailed in Section 3 of this report.
- 2.2 Members will be aware the Council's costs are mainly met through Business Rate income, a decreasing sum from New Homes Bonus Grant (NHB), Council Tax and through fees and charges on services it provides. A relatively smaller proportion is met from general government grant, although in recent years the settlement has included an important element; the minimum funding guarantee, this protects councils from sudden reductions in Government funding between years. The calculation looks at authorities Core Spending Power (CSP) taking account of Government Grants to be received and an assumed council tax level. We estimate through this we receive £2m for 2025/26.
- 2.3 The Local Government Finance Settlement is a crucial part in the Council's budget preparation. This details the rules and allocations around key income streams and how much the Council can expect to receive from them. The exception being fees and charges which in the main the Council can determine itself, except those controlled by Government for example planning fees.
- 2.4 The settlement was not expected until 19th December, therefore assumed too late to be reflected in this report to meet the agenda publishing timetable. However, the provisional settlement was published a day earlier on the 18th December, and it can be confirmed that the assumptions made in this report have not been materially affected.
- 2.5 Part of the financial picture that has helped us build our budget is the Governments Autumn Budget which took place on 30 October; the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) also published its updated economic and fiscal outlook for the next 5 years. The Budget announced £1.3bn new grant funding for local government in 2025/26, £600m of which will be earmarked for social care. While new funding is positive, the distribution methodology is unknown and any additional funding is unlikely to meet the continuing financial pressures on the authority. The key headlines included:
- Core Spending Power will increase by an estimated 3.2% in real terms in 2025/26. This includes £1.3bn of new grant funding – with £600m earmarked for social care, and £700m for general services.
 - Additional funding of £233m for homelessness prevention in 2025/26.
 - The distribution of both will not be known until the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.
 - The Small business rates multiplier will be frozen and retail, hospitality and leisure (RHL) businesses will receive a 40% business rates relief in 2025/26. Councils will be compensated for the loss of business rates income.
 - Business rates will be reformed from 2026/27 to include lower multipliers for high-street RHL businesses, funded by increases for properties valued over £0.5m.
 - The Affordable Homes Programme will increase by £500m in 2025/26.
 - Right-to-buy discounts will be reduced by government, and local authorities will be able to retain 100% of the receipts from right-to-buy purchases.
 - Government will consult on a new long-term social housing rent settlement of CPI+1% for 5 years as well as the option on further potential measures such as a 10-year settlement.
 - Employer National Insurance Contributions will increase by 1.2% in 2025/26 and a lowering of the contribution threshold from £9,100 to £5,000 – although for the public

sector, including local government, the increase for direct employees is expected to be compensated.

- There was no explicit mention of Council Tax principles in the Budget however it has been indicated that for 2025/26 these would remain at 2.99% main rate and 2% Adult Social Care (ASC) precept.

2.6 The adopted Financial Plan containing the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) model was developed and presented before the Autumn Budget announcement. The details in the budget were not materially different to that assumed in the MTFP and prior announcements by Government leading up to the budget were helpful. The model takes several factors and assumptions into account giving us a high-level estimate of the likely position before detailed work is undertaken on the Council's annual budget preparation. It was assumed that business rate rebasing would not occur until 2026/27.

2.7 The Financial Sustainability Model (FSM), also part of the Financial Plan, is used to steer the Council into actions to deliver a balanced budget. After taking such actions into account there remained a balance outstanding in the MTFP of the £225k to find, the adopted Plan stated the balance would be found from a reduction in the staffing establishment with non-replacement of vacant posts. The ability for the Executive Leadership Team to determine which posts not to replace, determine where it is necessary to redirect resources towards new posts where there are capacity, skill or resilience gaps in the establishment, with the overall requirement for the year to make the necessary savings.

2.8 As stated, the Local Government Finance Settlement was not published when drafting this report but as precursor the Local Government Policy Statement was issued on the 28th November giving more headline details of what is to be expected in the actual Settlement. The key messages to add from the Autumn Budget are:

- Initial steps are being taken in the 2025/26 Settlement to rebalance local government finance between councils, there is a redirecting of resources to authorities with social care responsibilities with an increase of £680m and creating a new £600m Recovery Grant to be distributed to areas with greater need and demand for services (using deprivation as a proxy for this, therefore unlikely for EDDC to receive an allocation), and less ability to raise income locally. This money has been found from abolishing two existing grant streams that we currently benefited from:
 - Rural Services Delivery Grant we currently receive £265k
 - Services Grant we receive £58k
- New Homes Bonus (NHB) will continue in 2025/26, but the allocation pot is likely to reduce – Currently we are receiving £1.15m, this is estimated to reduce to £0.685m, with the indication this will be the final year of payment.
- All councils will receive additional income from Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (EPR) payments (our allocation being £899k). EPR payments will be guaranteed and is not ringfenced funding. This funding derives from some organisations and businesses having to pay a fee for packaging they supply to or import into the UK market. Local authorities are being passed this income to support the net costs of collecting, managing, recycling and disposing of household packaging waste.

- The Policy included the statement that considering all funding allocated through the Finance Settlement and EPR payments, almost all councils will receive a real-terms increase in funding. The EPR is an additional payment but is being taken into account, along with assumed council tax increases by Government in ensuring councils are no worse off year on year. However, the Policy also states that the EPR is excluded from councils' Core Spending Power (CSP) used to calculate the Minimum Funding Guarantee. The wording is vague, and it is not until the final settlement we will know for certain, there is a risk in treating this as additional monies in our budget, this is further considered in Section 2.11 of this report.
- Council Tax referendum principles for district councils will remain at 2.99% or £5 with the continuation of an additional 2% for social care authorities. In 2025/26 a £5 increase equates to a 3% increase for us. If the principles remain at the same level then from 2026/27 then 2.99% will become greater than a £5 increase for us.
- Confirmation that Councils will be compensated for the cost of the Employers National Insurance increase for directly employed staff only.
- There will be a fundamental reform to the local government funding model after 2025/26. The Government will launch a consultation in December on a new approach to allocating funding (Fair Funding) and will launch in January a technical consultation on resetting business rates for 2026/27. This has major implications on this Council for 2026/27, members will be kept informed as this progresses.

Draft Revenue Budget 2025/26

- 2.9 The Council's draft budget is Balanced, it includes £899k EPR grant income and assumes that the outcome of the Finance Settlement we will be a standstill position for our Core Spending Power (CSP) with no inflationary increase. This position is achieved through grant income from the Minimum Funding Guarantee, without this adjustment we would be seeing a 12.1% reduction in funding. This assessment has been taken from LGFutures who provide councils with detailed calculations at individual authority level based on Government announcements, a service we subscribe to. We have checked these calculations against our own understanding, and they accord. They are estimates and it is not until the final settlement is published that we will know the position for sure. As stated now the Provisional Settlement has been announced just prior to this report publication so it can be confirmed that the assumptions made on Government Funding and other areas of the Settlement are in line with this report and no amendments to the budget are required.
- 2.10 The current budget for 2024/25 increased the General Fund Balance by £500k to mitigate the risk related to the new Recycling and Waste contract terms and at the time outstanding negotiations regarding the Leisure Agreement. Both these areas are now more certain within the draft budget for 2025/26, it proposed to leave the additional sum in the General Fund Balance at this stage to mitigate the risk of an adverse Settlement announcement compared with the draft budget. The Council also has a MTFP Risk Reserve with £2.9m available but this is likely to be required in considering the 2026/27 budget. Now this risk for 2025/26 no longer exists based on the Provisional Settlement announcement it is proposed the Balance remains at the higher level to mitigate the risk of pay inflation as detailed later in this report.
- 2.11 The MTFP assumed there would be a balance to find from staff establishment savings, as outlined in 2.6 above, we have seen variations in the detailed budget preparation compared

with the MTFP estimate, as would be expected, but a main difference is the inclusion of income from ERP. To offset this additional income, we had assumed inflationary increases across Government Grants we are now expecting a stand still position. The draft budget is balanced without the necessity for a staff saving line in the budget which is a preferable and more certain position to present to Council. The Executive Leadership Team will still need to make decisions on staffing going forward as the budget has not accommodated new post requests, these will still have to be met from savings from the existing establishment.

2.12 A summary position of the General Fund draft budget is given below. Further details are contained in the Budget Book linked to this report showing the current budget and the proposed budget for 2025/26 alongside. The draft budget has been prepared based on continuing to provide existing services. The draft budget includes key areas that align to the Council Plan and the draft Directorate Service Plans.

2.13 Members will note a change in layout of the summary below and the budget book compared with previous years. More detailed budget analysis is provided defining “Controllable” and “Non-Controllable” expenditure and income.

- Controllable – This refers to expenditure or income that results in an actual payment or receipt of money to the Council. Reducing expenditure or increasing income within these budget heads has a real effect on the net cost of running the Council and the budget manager can control and manage these areas.
- Non-Controllable – This pertains to internal transfers between services, no actual money is involved. It involves one service of the Council working for another, this results in a recharge cost for the receiving service and reversing recharge income for the supporting area. These transactions net off to zero and do not affect the net cost of running the Council.
- Variation analysis between budget years looks at Controllable budgets, these are relevant to the budget position. We have reviewed the methodology of recharges for 2025/26 creating lots of variations between years, but they have no effect on the overall position and by excluding them for comparison this helps compare true costs. Appendix 1 gives further details on the recharge process.

General Fund Revenue Budgets 2025/26

| | 24/25 Controllable** £ | 24/25 Non-controllable** £ | 24/25 Original*** £ | 25/26 Controllable £ | 25/26 Non-controllable £ | 25/26 Original £ | Controllable Variance £ | Notes |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|-------|
| Portfolio Budget - Net Expenditure | (a) | (b) | (c) = (a) + (b) | (d) | (e) | (f) = (d) + (e) | (a) vs (d) | |
| Corporate Business | 120,680 | 112,310 | 232,990 | 96,960 | 43,321 | 140,281 | -23,720 | 1 |
| Corporate Services | 6,907,580 | -4,336,320 | 2,571,260 | 6,431,363 | -6,175,874 | 255,489 | -476,217 | 2 |
| Economy And Regenrtn Portfolio | 1,508,478 | -936,850 | 571,628 | 1,668,340 | -764,092 | 904,248 | 153,862 | 3 |
| Environment Portfolio | 5,825,929 | 52,830 | 5,878,759 | 6,227,375 | 395,081 | 6,622,456 | 401,446 | 4 |
| Finance | 85,310 | -662,140 | -576,830 | 42,810 | -905,033 | -862,223 | -42,500 | 5 |
| Strategic Development & P'Ship | 1,821,062 | 1,026,750 | 2,847,812 | 2,080,356 | 1,680,417 | 3,760,773 | 253,294 | 6 |
| Street Scene Portfolio | 13,043,350 | 1,322,660 | 14,366,010 | 14,143,670 | 1,395,434 | 16,139,104 | 1,100,320 | 7 |
| Sustainable Homes & Communitie | 2,088,892 | 19,264 | 2,108,156 | 2,098,440 | 545,162 | 2,643,602 | 9,548 | 8 |
| Portfolio Totals | 31,401,281 | -3,401,496 | 27,999,785 | 32,783,314 | -3,185,584 | 29,603,730 | 401,446 | |
| | | | 24/25 Original £ (c) = (a) + (b) | | | 25/26 Original £ (f) = (d) + (e) | Variance Original £ (c) vs (f) | |
| Reversal of Capital Charges (Depreciation) | | | -3,347,540 | | | -3,125,220 | -377,680 | |
| Portfolio Totals Net of Capital Charges | | | 24,652,245 | | | 25,878,510 | 23,766 | |
| Interest Receipts (Net of investment management fees) | | | -1,581,690 | | | -2,071,410 | -489,720 | |
| Interest Payable | | | 300 | | | 310 | 10 | |
| PwLB Interest & Principal Repayments | | | 506,410 | | | 1,260,447 | 754,037 | |
| Net Expenditure | | | 23,577,265 | | | 25,067,857 | 288,093 | |
| Government Grants | | | | | | | | |
| New Homes Bonus Grant | | | -1,147,701 | | | -685,040 | 462,661 | |
| Rural Services Delivery Grant | | | -265,000 | | | 0 | 265,000 | |
| Minimum Funding Guarantee Grant | | | -1,714,000 | | | -2,096,870 | -382,870 | |
| Service Grant | | | -58,000 | | | 0 | 58,000 | |
| EPR Grant | | | 0 | | | -839,000 | -839,000 | |
| Use of Reserves | | | | | | | | |
| Use of Collection fund surplus | | | -96,000 | | | -464,120 | -368,120 | |
| Earmarked Reserves | | | -865,411 | | | -373,455 | 491,956 | |
| Use of MTFP Risk Reserve | | | 0 | | | 0 | 0 | |
| Contribution to/(from) General Fund Balance | | | 500,000 | | | 0 | -500,000 | |
| Budget Requirement | | | 19,931,153 | | | 20,549,372 | 618,219 | |
| Revenue Support Grant | | | -278,000 | | | -282,190 | -4,190 | |
| Business Rate Baseline Funding | | | -3,733,000 | | | -3,789,000 | -56,000 | |
| Business Rate Retention Inflation Uplift | | | -5,077,242 | | | -4,835,000 | 242,242 | |
| Business Rate Pooling Gain | | | -428,000 | | | -453,000 | -25,000 | |
| Reported Council Tax Requirement | | | 10,414,911 | | | 11,190,182 | 775,271 | |

*controllable - expenditure and income (cash) **non-controllable - e.g. internal recharge ***Original budget - total annual budget

2.14 Significant variations between years to note:

- Overall, employment related costs have risen by £1m offset by £476k for the expected compensating income regarding the National Insurance increase. For 2025/26 an assumed pay increase of 2% has been built in, any actual change to this is a financial risk to the council.
- Premises and Transport costs have increased to £3.9m (2024/25 £3.6m) across service budget areas.
- Total income in fees and charges has increase by £0.7m to £17.1m from £16.4m.

Service specific variations referenced to the table above.

1. Corporate Business

End of a fixed term Information and Complaints Officer post, funded by transformation reserve in 2024/25.

2. Corporate Services

Reduction following removal of 2024/25 staff contingency (pay award) budget, now built into base budget.

Compensated amount (£565k) for the increase in National Insurance is held within Corporate Services pending further detail of scheme operation.

Strata IT provision budget increase of £132k.

3. Environment

£200k LED service payment decrease over 2024/25 budget, offset with new Senior Leisure Officer post (£60k).

Sports centre maintenance budget increased by £30k, reflect historical level of spend.

4. Finance

Additional Parking income of £350k (net) at +10%. Offset with an increase in maintenance costs (£30K) and increases in Rates of £54k.

5. Strategic Development & Partnerships

Reduction in income within Development Management (£280k). Budget now reflects growth based on ten-year average.

Increase of £50k (£200k) to the New Town budget.

6. StreetScene

Total expenditure on recycling and waste has increased by £450k, reflecting the new contract arrangements and increased property numbers (£667k), staffing cost £100k, premises costs totalling £89k, offset with increased materials income receipts of £404k.

Green Waste has an improved position of £75k, reflecting increases in income of £122k but increased provision of replacement bins of £43k.

Parks & Ground maintenance has seen increase to budget of £87k for the purchase of Plant per the rolling replacement programme.

7. Sustainable Homes and Communities

No net material change.

2.15 There are specific areas of risk to highlight to members from the draft budget:

- As raised the budget has been prepared without the details of the final Settlement. Best information has been used but it is likely there will be an adverse or favourable variation. It is proposed within a reasonable limit any variation will be handled as:
 - Adverse – the General Fund Balance will be used with the mitigation that the Balance is being maintained with the additional sum of £500k to offset this eventuality.
 - Favourable – Currently the General Fund Budget has an assumed pay inflation of 2% for 2025/26 it would be preferable to add a further sum as a budget contingency, 1% equates to £289k, any Favourable variance should be used for this purpose. The HRA does have such a contingent budget.

To update members on this position with the Provisional Settlement being announced just prior to publication of this report there is no material overall difference from what was estimated compared with the Settlement. It is therefore proposed to leave the General Fund at the higher sum as currently reflected in the draft budget and for this to mitigate the possibility of higher pay inflation than assumed.

- The increase in NI contributions is a cost of £565k to the General Fund and £97k to the HRA, the budget assumes that these costs will be reimbursed to the Council in line with the Government's commitment, we await the detail of how this will be calculated and happens in practice.
- A New Town budget of £200k is included, the initial request was £300k, but the service has been asked to reprofile expenditure and consider the current year underspend and reserve sums in this area in helping us manage the budget position. We are also still pursuing external grant funding for this work but there is a risk the budget sum may fall short in year.
- The budget has been prepared under tight constraints, pressures have been raised during the processes with staff resources; pressures with capacity and skill gaps which have not been accommodated in the draft budget because of affordability.

StreetScene have highlighted pressures in front line operational capacity and in the Engineers team. Other service areas are under pressure with the implications of a growing district, the Executive Leadership Team have also identified organisational

capacity and skill gaps such as project management, transformation capacity, and other corporate functions.

The Executive Leadership are considering this position in how best we can manage within our overall staffing budget envelope.

2.11 Council Tax

The draft budget assumes the Council will increase the Council Tax for 2025/26 by £5 a year. This is in line with the MTFP and assumptions made by Government on funding available to the Council. This gives a precept for the Council of £11,190,436 raising the current annual council tax charge from £166.78 to £171.78 for a band D property, a 3% increase. This is the maximum increase allowed within the Referendum regulations (£5 or 2.99% which is ever is the greater).

This is based on the Council Tax Base of 65,142.52 band D properties; an increase of 2,695.52 compared with the current year.

The ability to allow Councils to charge double council tax for 2nd homes is to be introduced 2025/26. This Council has approved the policy for the additional charge and is included in the above taxbase calculation.

2.12 General Fund Balance

At the beginning of the current financial year the General Fund Balance stood at £4.3m with an additional £0.5m added in year following approval of the 2024/25 budgeted increase given the reported risks within the approved budget. This is at the upper end of the agreed adopted range between £4m and £4.8m.

The purpose of this statutory reserve includes:

- Holding a working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing.
- a contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies.
- a means of building up funds, this can take the form of earmarked reserves.

To assess the adequacy of unallocated general reserves when setting the budget, the chief finance officer should take account of the strategic, operational, and financial risks facing the authority.

Authorities have been faced by increasing financial pressures and a period of severely constrained resources since 2008. Demands on local government services continue to increase. Local authorities now face significant resource pressures because of previous increased inflation and the cost-of-living challenges.

Events such as the floods and severe weather episodes and the COVID-19 pandemic have emphasised the need for authorities to be prepared for major unforeseen events. Adequate insurance cover combined with appropriate levels of reserves will enable authorities to manage the demands placed on them in such circumstances.

The 2024/25 budget included £0.5m General Fund contribution specifically to increase the headroom within the balance to help mitigate against the identified risks with the Recycling and Waste Collection contract and also the Leisure Agreement. Its proposed to leave the additional sum in the General Fund Balance at this stage to mitigate the risk of a higher pay inflation than assumed..

There is no set formula in determining the appropriate level to be held but a common approach we have adopted is to consider a percentage of the Net Expenditure Budget over

a period; we have set 10% to cover a year and half giving £3.5m. To this we have added £1.3m as additional headroom to help cover any significant unforeseen service risks.

Budget proposals for 2025/26 propose the General Fund Balance adopted range is £4m to £4.8m.

2.13 Business Rates

The 2025/26 budget uses the Government's assumed funding calculation at £3.789m (to be confirmed), to this an additional £4.835m has been added to reflect the estimated income above base received in business rates (projection in line with LGFutures estimates for EDDC).

Also, a business rate gain has been included for remaining in the Devon Pool estimated at £0.453m.

The Council does hold a Rates Volatility Fund of £1.172m accumulated from previous Business Rate surplus to mitigate the risk if Rates do not achieve this full level and it helps smooth out year on year fluctuations.

2.14 New Homes Bonus (NHB)

The Government intention is to end the NHB scheme, the grant for 2025/26 is assumed at only £0.685m but is to be confirmed, this is a reduction of £0.401m from 2024/25. Prior to final settlement being known an assumption has been made that this reduction will be compensated by an increase in the Minimum Guarantee Funding for the Council, but these figures should be considered preliminary and likely to change.

2.15 Fees & Charges Schedule

Attached (background links) is the 2025/26 Fees & Charges Schedule, this lists the current charges in place and the proposed charges for next year. The related income has been included in the draft budget and the schedule and associated charges are to be approved as part the budget process. In the main charges are increased in line with inflation, car park charges have increased by inflation in accordance with officers understanding of previous member debate and request not to have periods of no increase followed by a significant uplift to keep pace with inflation as was the case previously with a 10 year stand still. We have now reached an inflation point where a rounded amount can be applied on the main hourly car park charge of 10p.

Budget Strategy for future years

2.16 The Council's adopted Financial Plan 2025 – 2035 comprised two parts:

Part A - The Medium Term Financial Plan Model (MTFP)

The MTFP provided a financial model and forecast of the cost of providing services over a rolling ten year-period, together with an estimate of the financial resources that are likely to be available to the Council. An extract from that Model is shown below and highlighted the possible impact of business rates rebasing in 2026/27 with a shortfall of £4m. The Government has now stated its intention that this will happen, it was only an assumption in the MTFP, how this will be introduced and

what safeguards might be put in place we await details with the consultation promised.

| General Fund | 2025/26 £000 | 2026/27 £000 | 2027/28 £000 | 2028/29 £000 | 2029/30 £000 | 2030/31 £000 | 2031/32 £000 | 2032/33 £000 | 2033/34 £000 | 2034/35 £000 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Budget Shortfall/(Surplus) | 225 | 3,970 | 1,249 | 563 | 487 | 485 | 484 | 482 | 370 | 587 |

The draft budget now prepared in detail for 2025/26 gives a balanced budget, however future year budget shortfalls remain.

Part B – Financial Sustainability Model (FSM)

This part of the Financial Plan considers how the Council will balance its finances over the coming years to continue to provide service for its residents and customers. It ensures we are achieving Value for Money throughout the Council within each service; it evidences this and seeks improvement and savings where possible. Key enablers are identified to aid us in this process.

Depending on the outcome of this work and savings achieved, consideration will then need to be given to service reductions to balance the books to achieve financial sustainability.

If the funding gap estimated in 2026/27 of £4m materialises, which is dependent on Government direction, then efficiencies and income generation are unlikely to drive the level of savings required and we may need to propose service reductions. Importantly, as mentioned, phasing and any mitigations the Government may introduce is a key factor, as details are released members will be kept informed and a further report is likely in February to give members an update.

A key factor is the English Devolution White Paper published on 16th December which will shape local government going forward, consideration needs to be given on the impact and timings for this Council and the implications on future service provision to residents and businesses in the District. It is too early to determine any detail at this stage.

3 Housing Revenue Account Budget

3.1 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Overview & Introduction

Below is an overview of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) with prescribed categories of expenditure and income giving the proposed budgetary implications for 2025/26. There is also a Q&A section in Appendix 2 included to assist.

The HRA records expenditure and income on running the council's own housing stock and related services or facilities, which are provided primarily for the benefit of the council's own tenants. The HRA is a ringfenced account within the General Fund with strict legal and accounting rules to maintain separation from the General Fund. The HRA Account must always remain in surplus, and this must be considered when setting each year's budget and when planning for the future.

The HRA consists of capital and revenue elements. Capital is typically asset enhancing items such as kitchens, bathrooms, windows etc or a project of more minor works to multiple properties. Revenue is typically low-level repairs and maintenance with regards to spend on assets plus staff and service costs, overheads etc. The Council is allowed to

borrow to fund capital expenditure, but not revenue without specifically required central government permission.

3.2 **2024/25 HRA Budget Evolution**

The initial budget presented to members in this same paper a year ago was in effect a “roll over” budget from the previous year, with few changes other than known inflationary uplifts from that presented for 2023/24.

As members will be aware, the 2023/24 HRA outturn and capital spend far exceeded the expectations that were included within that year’s budget, requiring the contribution of all HRA earmarked revenue reserves and adding an additional £2.5m to the HRA’s borrowing requirement in order to maintain the £3.1m adopted level of the HRA balance.

Therefore, shortly after the start of the current financial year, it was established that the proposed 2024/25 budget would be insufficient to meet the needs and demands of the housing service and provide the investment required to ensure regulatory compliant homes. A revised budget was approved by Council in July 2024.

During the 2024/25 financial year there have been numerous significant budget movements within the HRA (virements) which in effect have transferred significant sums from revenue to capital. This has been the result of the underlying works included within the revised budget being scrutinised in detail within the regular collaborative financial management framework which has been established. This has been presented and where necessary approval given through HRA financial monitoring reports to Committees. The 2024/25 budget figures presented for comparison are those which are currently being reported, and monitored against in 2024/25.

3.3 **Revenue Budget**

The following outlines the key budget areas, headline figures and comparatives for the HRA in 2025/26 v 2024/25. The general spending categories below are set by the Chartered Institute for Public Financial Accountancy (CIPFA) with a brief summary of what is included in each.

3.4 **Income**

The primary sources of income for the HRA are rents on dwellings, garage income and other income including service charges. Rent on dwellings has been increased by the central government recommendation of September CPI +1% (1.7%+1% = 2.7%) with the remaining income streams also appropriately inflated. The forecast income is expected to be:

- £21.66m for dwellings, an increase of £0.57m year on year
- £0.26m for garages, an increase of £0.1m year on year
- £0.74m for other income, an increase of £0.05m

3.5 **Repairs and Maintenance (R&M)**

This includes all major expenditure which falls into the revenue category and is segregated into general or responsive R&M and planned R&M, the vast majority of which is covered by our Integrated Asset Management contract (IAMC) with Ian Williams Ltd.

- General or responsive R&M generally results from issues that have been raised by tenants for resolution and can vary from incredibly simple jobs such as fixing a tap to much more complicated involved issues to address. These more complex issues, upon surveying, may well become asset enhancing and therefore would be moved to the Capitalised responsive repairs and maintenance budget.

- Planned R&M includes the more routine or cyclical in nature works such as decoration, planned minor works and compliance related testing and servicing.
- The budgeted spend on Repairs and Maintenance as a whole is approximately £7.13m an increase of £0.05m v 2024/25, which can be attributed to the inflationary increase on the Price Per Property payment under the IAMC.

3.6 Supervision & Management (S&M)

The S&M section of the HRA covers a wide variety of costs related to the management and administration of council-owned housing. Key types of expenditure include;

- All HRA direct staffing costs including training, development etc with regards to the day to day activities, management and administration of the service.
- Property Management costs – supervision of repairs, managing of empty properties and development of strategic property decisions.
- External Services & Overheads – including consultants' costs and recharges from the general fund for shared services such as IT, Legal Services, Accountancy etc
- The budget for Supervision & Management as a whole in 2025/26 is £9.1m a decrease of £0.29m v 2024/25, the most notable of which being;

- **£0.12m decrease in Employment costs**

The 2024/25 budget stated that the structure of the service was under review and included a significant contingency balance to address this. As stated in the recent Housing Review board meetings, housing senior management are now confident that we have roles in the right places, therefore the 2025/26 staffing budget has been based upon this structure. A 2% inflationary uplift has been applied to all roles and an additional 1% contingency, with the 15% change in National Insurance included but assumed to be refunded by central government as per the General Fund.

- **£0.20m decrease in Overheads/Recharges**

Recharges have been reviewed within the year through the collaborative financial management framework and despite increases due to Strata inflationary uplifts for external IT costs for example, savings have still been made year on year.

3.7 Other expenditure/Special Services

This section mainly includes the budgets for tenant engagement related activities such as the Tenant Participation and Community Development teams as well as special services that the Council must provide with regards to tenants. The most notable of this latter category is the decanting of tenants to temporary accommodation when major works are being undertaken and their Council dwelling is uninhabitable. The forecast expenditure is expected to be £1.15m an increase of £0.06m on the prior year.

3.8 Capital Charges

The two entries within this section of HRA expenditure are;

- Changes to the bad debt provision – this is difficult to predict and in the past when reviewing the actual movements has not been material therefore no entry has been made.
- Depreciation/Major Repairs Reserve/Revenue Contribution to Capital – the HRA guidelines require the council to make in effect what is a revenue contribution to capital which is equivalent to the amount of depreciation calculated on the council dwellings in that financial year. A £2m contribution has been included for 2025/26 a very marginal change to the budget of 2024/25 (the value of depreciation within the 2023/24 financial accounts was £1.8m).

3.9 HRA Financing

The HRA financing section can be split into 3 specific areas which are addressed below;

- **Debt Financing**

- As at 31st March 2024, the principal amount of debt the HRA owed was £84.6m, with £78.5m owed to the Public Works Loan Board and the remaining £6.1m owed to the General Fund.
- The 2025/26 financing charges have been increased by £0.47m. This reflects both the cost of additional borrowing based upon the 2024/25 Capital Financing requirement of £9.1m @ 4.5% plus a marginal outturn variation adjustment v the 2024/25 budget. This is addressed further in the Q&A section as there has been change in the assumptions made and stated in the final 2024/25 July budget report.

- **Interest Income**

- The 2024/25 budget did not contain an amount for interest income and the current treasury forecast is that the HRA will receive £0.43m based upon the balance of useable HRA reserves held (the HRA balance plus the right to buy receipts reserve).
- In 2025/26 an income amount has been included, however, due to the agreed reduction in the HRA balance in 2024/25 and capital expenditure in year on affordable homes, under the right to buy replacement program, this has been reduced to a conservative estimate of £0.24m.

- **Movement in Reserves**

- The current 2024/25 budget contains a revenue contribution to capital of £0.9m which finances the capital program and achieves the in year capital financing requirement as stated in the 2024/25 budget papers. The introduction of this has resulted from the in year virements previously mentioned. This will not be continued in 2025/26 as all revenue and capital spend has been correctly allocated.
- As stated in the 2024/25 budget, the agreed annual contribution to the HRA balance to be made each year of £0.25m, to reinstate the HRA balance to the adopted level of £3.1m, has been included in the 2025/26 budget.

3.10 Table of Movements

The following table shows the movements described above and the overall impact they have upon the 2025/26 budget in comparison with 2024/25.

| INCOME | BUDGET | | |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| | 24/25 | 25/26 | Diff |
| Dwelling Income | -21,088,320 | -21,659,900 | -571,580 |
| Garage Income | -155,292 | -262,800 | -107,508 |
| Other Income | -692,628 | -738,826 | -46,198 |
| | -21,936,240 | -22,661,526 | -725,286 |

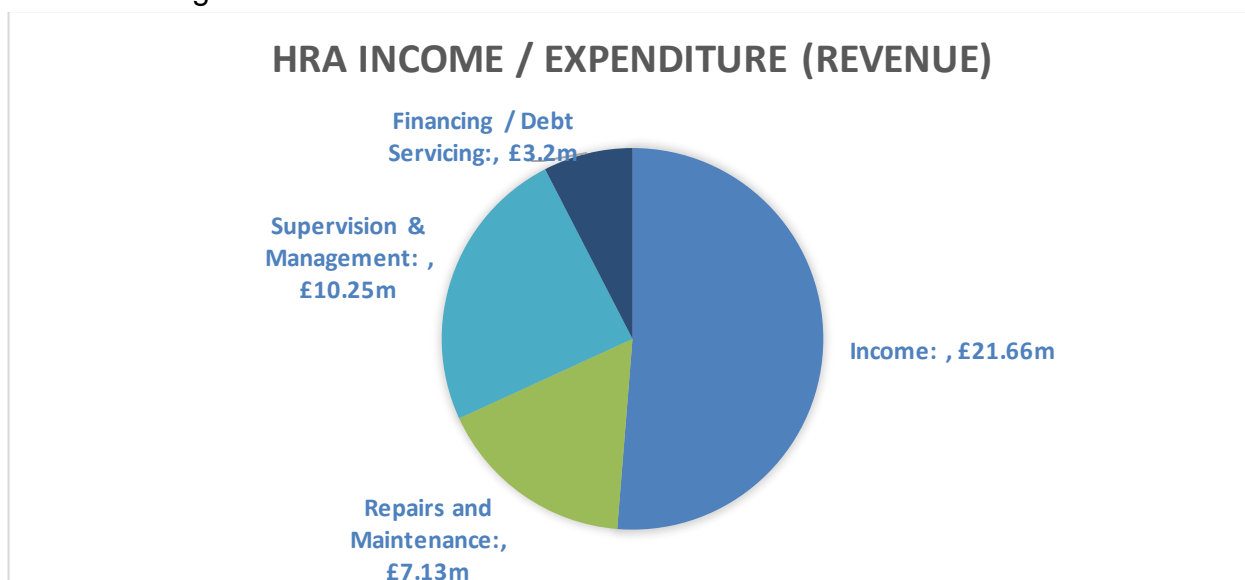
| EXPENDITURE | BUDGET | | |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|----------|
| | 24/25 | 25/26 | Diff |
| REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE | 7,083,504 | 7,133,867 | 50,363 |
| SUPERVISION & MANAGEMENT | 9,388,046 | 9,101,700 | -286,346 |
| OTHER EXPENDITURE | 1,091,844 | 1,154,351 | 62,507 |
| CAPITAL CHARGES | 2,028,300 | 2,000,000 | -28,300 |
| | 19,591,694 | 19,389,918 | -201,776 |

| FINANCING | BUDGET | | |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| | 24/25 | 25/26 | Diff |
| Debt Financing | 2,787,276 | 3,256,608 | 469,332 |
| Interest Income | 0 | -235,000 | -235,000 |
| Reserve/Capital Contribution | 893,270 | 250,000 | -643,270 |
| | 3,680,546 | 3,271,608 | -408,938 |

| HRA Account | BUDGET | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-------|------------|
| | 24/25 | 25/26 | Diff |
| Surplus/Deficit | 1,336,000 | 0 | -1,336,000 |

3.11 Graphical Split of HRA Budget Areas

The following table graphically highlights the four main categories that drive the makeup of the HRA budget for 25/26.



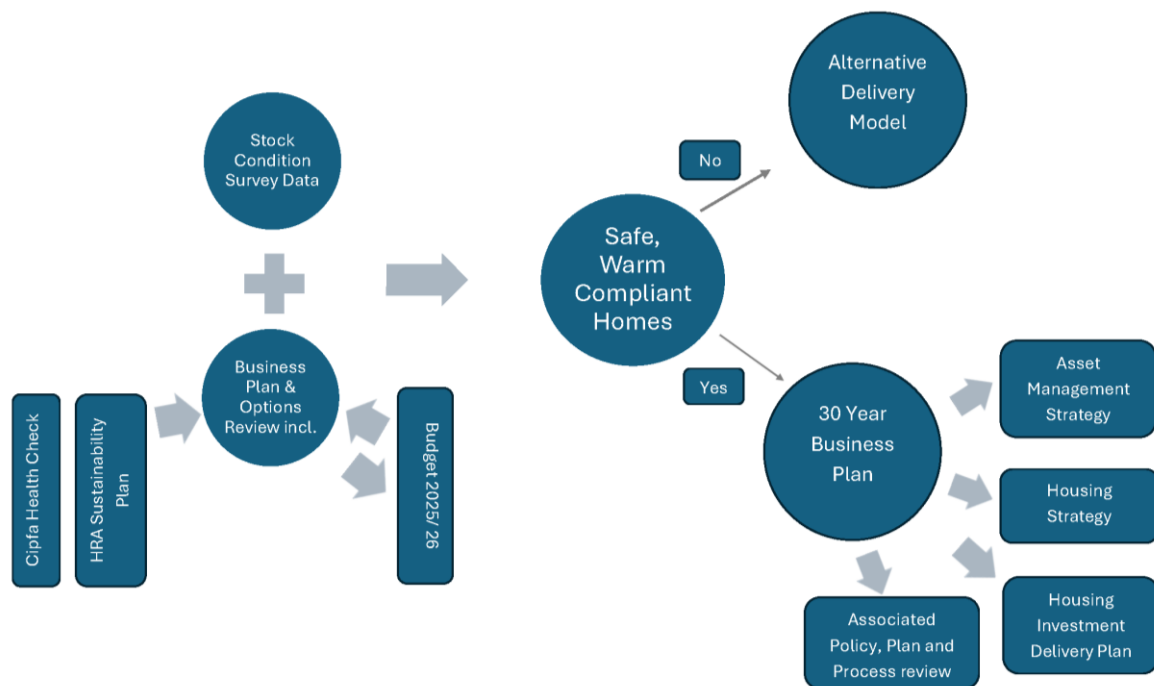
3.12 HRA Future Financial Pressures

The Housing Revenue Account has and continues to face, significant financial pressure in the immediate and longer term. These pressures arise from a range of factors including an

historic underinvestment, increased consumer and regulatory standards, general inflation, restrictions in rent increases, net zero expectations, disrepair claims, complaint resolution, high void and decant costs and other issues. Similar cost pressures are being seen in other stock holding local authorities.

3.13 Longer Term Financial Plan

In recognition of the above, the Council has developed a strategic plan to address these immediate pressures and ensure a long-term sustainable business model is in place to ensure we can provide safe, warm and regulatory compliant homes. This plan includes a series of interlinked plans, workstreams and strategies as set out in the diagram below.



A Financial Sustainability Plan is in place to address and respond to the short-term financial pressures facing the HRA. This plan sets out a range of measures to increase income and deliver savings over the next 1 – 2 years and includes recommendations from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA), who have undertaken a Health Check of the HRA.

Savills, a market leading expert in Asset Management consultancy, are also assisting the Council with a Business Plan and Options review. This will enable the Council to produce a robust Asset Management Strategy whilst considering alternative delivery models if appropriate and create a 30-year Business Plan to ensure the HRA remains a going concern.

The objective of a business plan is to ensure sufficient annual budget is available to improve and maintain our homes whilst continuing to provide good quality services to our tenants. It's aim is to model income streams whilst also setting out and phasing the key objectives for maintaining the housing stock on an ongoing basis. Including within these objectives will be priorities such as decarbonisation, stock management (including plans to acquire or build new affordable homes) and required essential upgrades and enhancements throughout the plans lifecycle.

The results of the stock condition survey will interlink with the longer-term financial planning outlined above, ensuring investment is targeted and efficient.

3.14 2025/26 Proposed Capital Budget Considerations

Unfortunately, as has been discussed in previous committees, the Stock Condition data is not available to drive the 2025/26 budget preparation. There are, however, clear known priorities for capital investment in our stock which has influenced the creation of the 2025/26 capital programme. These include.

- Addressing Category 1 & 2 Hazards
- Tackling Damp & Mould
- Continuing to ensure Regulatory Compliance
- Increasing the number of Decent Homes
- Reduced responsive repairs through planned investment programmes.
- Addressing major repair works
- Reducing void turnover times

3.15 Proposed Capital Programme 2025/26

The following Table outlines the proposed capital programme for 2025/26, categorised by their appropriate programme areas, compared with the current 2024/25 position.

| Programme Area | Project / Programme | 24/25 Budget | 25/26 Budget | Diff |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Affordable Homes | RTB Acquisitions | 3,320,000 | 750,000 | -2,570,000 |
| Housing Compliance | FRA Actions | 800,000 | 500,000 | -300,000 |
| | Co2 & Detection | 400,000 | 500,000 | 100,000 |
| | Fire Doors | 650,000 | 1,050,000 | 400,000 |
| | RADON | 0 | 150,000 | 150,000 |
| | Sewerage Plants | 500,000 | 500,000 | 0 |
| General Housing Programmes | Disrepair And Complaints | 1,810,000 | 1,500,000 | -310,000 |
| | Social Serv Adaptations | 746,000 | 700,000 | -46,000 |
| | LAD Programme Completion | 150,000 | 2,099,520 | 1,949,520 |
| | Capital Major Works | 710,000 | 3,242,900 | 2,532,900 |
| Major Repairs | Windows | 150,000 | 416,000 | 266,000 |
| | Roofing Renewal | 132,000 | 264,000 | 132,000 |
| | Replacement Bathrooms | 240,000 | 400,000 | 160,000 |
| | Replacement Kitchens | 550,000 | 1,300,000 | 750,000 |
| | Pvcu Fascia Replacement | 0 | 150,000 | 150,000 |
| | Heating Upgrades | 0 | 150,000 | 150,000 |
| | Gas Boilers Replacement | 500,000 | 750,000 | 250,000 |
| | Electrical Updating | 975,000 | 700,000 | -275,000 |
| | Capitalised Responsive Repairs | 1,000,000 | 1,000,000 | 0 |
| | Ppv Voids | 2,500,000 | 2,250,000 | -250,000 |
| TOTAL | | 15,133,000 | 18,372,420 | 3,239,420 |

3.16 HRA Capital Programme Overview

Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) (£0.75m)

The AHP is expenditure allocated to the acquisition and development of new affordable housing. It is now funded entirely from Right to Buy receipts per the recent central Government guidance. The Council are currently developing a Housing Investment and Delivery plan which will set out our intentions for investment in future years. Whilst we have

paused our acquisitions programme until this is completed, an amount of £0.75m has been included to account for operational or strategic acquisitions that may arise in 2025/26.

Housing Compliance (£2.7m)

The Council has a duty to ensure our homes meet the required legal and regulatory compliance standards. Our compliance work includes capital expenditure to remediate fire risks, undertake programmes of co2 and smoke detection installations and other similar capital expenditure. Areas such as servicing and testing of existing compliance equipment are non-capital works and accounted for within the Revenue budget.

HRA Capital Programme – General (£7.5m)

The Capital Programme – General, includes the following items

- **Disrepair And Complaints**
Capital expenditure on disrepair and complaints is forecast to amount to £2.15m during 2024/25 and includes essential repairs work. Expenditure in this area is forecast to reduce in 2025/26 as planned programmes address issues with stock condition resulting in a reduction in disrepair and complaints.
- **Social Services Adaptations**
This includes major adaptations including remodelling, accessible bathrooms, stairlifts etc to provide suitably adapted accommodation for our residents.
- **LAD - Programme Completion**
The LAD is a programme of improvement works focused on energy efficiency to an identified number of properties for which the Council received partial government funding. The budget provides the necessary capital to complete the programme and meet our obligations under the grant funding award.
- **Capital Major Works**
This programme includes specific Major Projects allocated to a specific property, group of properties or block of flats. These items range widely in nature and cover a multitude of issues from whole block refurbishments to items identified in specific properties which if left unresolved may result in health and safety issues for tenants.

Major Repairs £7.4m

The major repairs capital budget includes expenditure for our major repairs programme such as windows, doors, kitchens etc alongside repairs to void properties and some responsive repair costs.

3.17 Additional Borrowing Implications

The impact of the above capital programme will add an additional £15.15m borrowing requirement to the HRA after applying the following funding streams to the £18.37 Capital Expenditure figure;

- £0.75m RTB receipts for Affordable Housing
- £0.47m unringfenced RTB receipts
- £2m depreciation related/Major Repairs Contribution

3.18 Potential In Year Variations/Virements

The recent stock condition survey provides the necessary data to develop a robust Business Plan and Asset Management Strategy. This will enable future investment to be targeted efficiently and effectively to address the issues and maintenance requirements identified through the Stock Condition Survey. This process is ongoing and may result in a change in a change in capital investment priorities during the year. For example, this may include an increase in capital expenditure in one area and a reduction in another. Any changes will however be within the overall cost envelope of the approved capital programme budget.

3.19 Risks & Future Implications of the Capital Programme

It should be noted that the proposed capital programme amounts to a significant investment in the Councils housing stock. This investment will result in a substantial level of additional borrowing and an increase in the overall HRA Debt burden. The servicing of this debt will be met from within the HRA Revenue Budget and therefore create further pressure on revenue in future years. This additional interest expense burden will need to be offset by efficiencies, savings and income generation through strategic asset disposals. The longer-term revenue implications of capital investment will be modelled as part of the Business Plan review to ensure the HRA remains a going concern.

4 Council's Overall Capital Programme

The Financial Picture

- 4.1 The draft Capital Programme for 2025/26, after in year available resources are used, gives an overall funding need of £27.633m; comprising £12.483 General Fund and £15.15 HRA. The funding position across years will be managed in the most efficient manner considering the Council's overall Treasury Management position.
- 4.2 Any underfunded capital is factored into the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) calculation (the amount required to be charged to the revenue account for unfunded capital) in line with the Council's MRP Policy. In addition, there will either be interest on any external loans required to be factored in, or the loss of investment interest on any internal borrowing used. This has been factored into the 2025/26 draft budget. The HRA is not required to charge MRP, instead a depreciation charge annually to the account.
- 4.3 The preparation of the draft Capital Budget has been directed by the Budget Setting & Allocation Panel who met on 11th November 2024 to consider scheme proposals. The Panel considered funding resources available, the capital appraisal process and then each scheme proposal in turn. A total of £6.522m was approved to be included in the programme, however £1.580m was forward funding of Exmouth SANG with a further £0.106m relating to property linked to LED will be subject to further discussion to ensure compatibility with the agreed LED SLA position. Minutes of this meeting are presented to Cabinet.
- 4.4 The capital appraisal process has been used to build a capital programme aimed at delivering the Council's stated priorities and ensuring schemes meet set outcomes. Each scheme is given a score against a set criteria such as how the project meets the Council Plan, the risk involved, any part funding, invest to save, service provision and carbon implications; scoring schemes higher which contributed to a reduction in carbon. This scoring is used to measure priority against the funding available.

For each scheme proposed an Initial Project Proposal Form was completed as governed in the adopted "Guide to Project Management". It was recognised by BSCAP the importance of the emerging Asset Management Plan in determining capital spend allocations going forward.

Draft Capital Budget 2025/26

4.5 The budget book details the draft capital programme for 2024/25 to 2028/29.

4.6 A summary of the capital funding position is given below:

| Capital Programme Financing | 2024/25 | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Budget | Budget | Budget | Budget | Budget | Budget |
| £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Net Expenditure to be Financed (GF & HRA) | 26,356,742 | 31,223,220 | 14,417,281 | 14,201,503 | 8,216,638 |
| Adjust for unused income from grants/contributions: | | | | | |
| | 26,356,742 | 31,223,220 | 14,417,281 | 14,201,503 | 8,216,638 |
| Financing: | | | | | |
| In year capital receipts General Fund | (200,000) | (200,000) | (200,000) | (200,000) | (200,000) |
| 3rd Party Loan repayments | (1,336,497) | (102,888) | (106,117) | (804,723) | (117,889) |
| GF Capital Receipts Reserve | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| General Fund Capital Receipts | (1,536,497) | (302,888) | (306,117) | (1,004,723) | (317,889) |
| HRA Released RTB and Misc Capital Receipts | (2,418,310) | (1,218,000) | (1,218,000) | (1,218,000) | (1,218,000) |
| HRA Rev contributions incl Depn | (2,921,570) | (2,068,870) | (2,068,870) | (2,068,870) | (2,068,870) |
| Other Revenue Funding incl Reserves | (982,995) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| HRA funding | (6,322,875) | (3,286,870) | (3,286,870) | (3,286,870) | (3,286,870) |
| New Homes Bonus Funding | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Net (internal borrowing) / Transfer to Capital Reserves balance | (18,497,370) | (27,633,462) | (10,824,294) | (9,909,911) | (4,611,879) |
| GF Loans/Internal Borrowing | (18,497,370) | (27,633,462) | (10,824,294) | (9,909,911) | (4,611,879) |
| Total Funding | (26,356,742) | (31,223,220) | (14,417,281) | (14,201,503) | (8,216,638) |
| Shortfall / (Surplus) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

4.7 The draft capital budget for 2025/26 totals £31.223m (net of direct grants), with the unfunded amount being £27.633m; comprising £12.483 General Fund and £15.15 HRA. There continues to be no New Homes Bonus (NHB) or significant capital receipts/reserves available to fund the capital programme.

5 Other Balances & Reserves available to the Council

5.1 The Council holds a number of earmarked reserves set aside for specific purposes, the use of such reserves in the 2025/26 draft budget are detailed in the budget book for members' information.

6. Robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves

6.1 This part of the report deals with the requirement of Section 25 (2) of the Local Government Act 2003 in that the Council's Chief Finance Officer (CFO) must report on the robustness of the estimates included in the budget and the adequacy of reserves for which the budget provides.

- 6.2 In terms of the robustness of the estimates, all known factors have been considered and the financial implications have been assessed at the point of preparation. Various budget assumptions have been made including the treatment of inflation and interest rates, estimates on the level and timing of capital receipts, the treatment of demand led pressures, the treatment of planned efficiency savings/productivity gains and levels of income, financial risks inherent in any new arrangements and capital developments and the availability of funds to deal with major contingencies and the need for any provisions. In each of these areas the Council's financial standing, management and track record have been considered in order to prepare robust budget proposals.
- 6.3 The proposed draft budgets for 2025/26 maintain both the General Fund balance and the Housing Revenue Account balance at agreed levels provided actual net expenditure is at, or below, the level forecast. Continuous monitoring and reports to Cabinet will highlight and make recommendations on any corrective action necessary to achieve this during 2025/26. The position on these Balances will be considered again at the 2024/25 Outturn stage when the final year end position is known.

This report has also been prepared without the Local Finance Settlement having been announced and members will be updated on the implications of the actual Settlement.

7. Prudential Code

- 7.1 The Local Government Act 2003 also requires under regulation for local authorities to have regard to the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) when setting and reviewing their affordable borrowing limit.
- 7.2 The key objective of the Code is to ensure, within a clear framework, that the capital investment plans of local authorities are affordable, prudent and sustainable. A further key objective is to ensure that treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice and in a manner that supports prudence, affordability and sustainability.
- 7.3 To demonstrate that local authorities have fulfilled these objectives, the Prudential Code sets out the indicators that must be used and the factors that must be taken into account. These indicators will be presented to the next Cabinet meeting when a recommendation will be made on the budget for 2025/26, Council Tax levy and Council House Rents.
- 7.4 A Capital Strategy is required to be approved by Council annually to consider any investment property the Council holds or likely to hold, what this means in terms of financial exposure and risk. This will be presented along with the documents above at the next Cabinet for onward approval by Council in February 2024.

Financial implications:

This report outlines in detail the financial implications and risks associated with the budgets proposed.

Legal implications:

No legal observations are required.

Appendix 1: Recharging of Costs

The recent restructure of the council, addition of new director and assistant director posts and their underlying reporting lines has meant that the recharges applied across the council required significant review and change. Upon doing this, the decision was made within Finance to redesign the recharge process in its entirety, as the existing historic spreadsheet model being used was no longer fit for purpose and didn't allow for efficient recalculation upon changes being made.

The recharge process now applied can be broken down into the following sections, with recharges applied down the structure or levels below and not back upwards, as this can cause an infinite loop of cost allocation. The recharge process begins once all other costs have been finalised and establishment has been confirmed.

A. Level1: Strata IT costs and Corporate Buildings

This first section of recharges considers the above related cost centres and allocates them in their entirety across every cost centre on an FTE basis, from the Chief Exec level all the way down the structure of the council.

B. Level2&3: ELT Level Recharges

Upon receiving the above costs into their cost centres, the total achieved for the Chief Exec initially is allocated down to the Director level, again based upon FTEs, then with the CEO recharge also included the Directors costs are then allocated similarly.

C. Level4: Corporate Council Core Service Recharges

Those cost centres considered next are those which are core council services and which have previously been earmarked to be 100% reallocated, such as HR, Accountancy, Corporate Health & Safety & Medical fees as examples. The total on each cost centre for these areas, after the allocation of 1&2 above are then also reallocated across the council on an FTE basis.

D. Level5: Intra Service Recharges

The total on each of the cost centres that have chosen to reallocate charges from Operational or Management cost centres, down to their underlying service lines are then considered after 1-3 have been applied. These are generally done on a specific percentage basis, examples of these being Licensing, Planning Admin and Street Scene Management.

E. Level6: Specific Recharge Costs

The final level of recharges is where specific charges of specific amounts are made from one service/cost centre to the other. This generally occurs where it is either too complex to use overall percentages or a service is simply charging for a specific allocation of work/project costs that occurs within the year.

Appendix 2: HRA Q&A

Q: The statements made with regards to additional borrowing required within the 24/25 budget vary from those included within this report, why is that?

A: The 24/25 budget report included an amount referred to as a Voluntary Revenue Provision (VRP) that the HRA had made of £4.4m which would be used to reduce the borrowing requirement. The £4.4m referred to amounts that had been passed to the capital adjustment account (i.e. placed into a reserve between 2014-2017, although this reserve is unusable). The external advice we received from both an external HRA specialist consultant who was reviewing our accounts and then through CIPFA at the time was that we could spend against this £4.4m amount, contribute the expenditure element to the same reserve, netting to 0. Ultimately meaning for £4.4m of capital expenditure we would not require additional borrowing.

Unfortunately, these assumptions were incorrect as these amounts were not “available” VRP within the Capital Adjustment Account but contributions which paid down tranches of debt which became due in year (£0.6m in 2014, £1m in 2015, £1.5m in 2016 and £1.3m in 2017). The policy during these years was to pay down debt as it became due to reduce the interest burden on the HRA.

Q: The budget for Garage Income has increased significantly, whys is this considering the garage stock isn't in a good state of order?

A: The 24/25 budgeted amount for garage income is £0.155m. All income has been reviewed against the period 6/week 26 actuals for 24/25, forecast to the year end (multiplied by 2) and inflated. This provides a net figure of £0.263m (Income of £0.525m less an adjustment for void garages of £0.262m). The garage void ratio of 50% has been compared for the last 3 years in terms of actuals and it has remained consistent. As any redevelopment of garage sites awaits the decisions made within the options appraisal/asset management strategy the assumption made is that this will continue.

Q: What are the Council doing to address Damp and Mould

A: Damp and mould is a serious issue and can contribute to poor health. The Council are undertaking a range of measures to address the issue, including providing advice to tenants on how to avoid damp, making it easier for tenants to report damp and mould and also tackling the causes of damp through repair works. Our approach will prioritise any identified major damp issues before focusing on improving lower-level damp issues.

Q: What are the Council doing to address Category 1 and 2 Hazards

A: The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is used to determine whether a house is "fit for human habitation" There are 2 categories of hazards. Cat 1 and 2. Category 1 are serious and require urgent remediation. Category 2 hazards are less serious but can cause health issues for occupants. The stock condition survey identified that 1.2% (44 homes) had Cat 1 hazards compared to a national average of 5.1%. All identified Cat 1 hazards are addressed as a matter of urgency once identified.

Q: What are the Council doing to deliver more decent homes.

A: The Decent Homes Standard (DHS) sets the minimum standards for social housing in England and ensures a property is in a reasonable state of repair. This includes key building components like the roof, chimneys, and internal amenities such as kitchens and heating systems. 11.96% of homes in East Devon fail the DHS which is broadly in line with the national average of

11.3%. The proposed budget includes a significant investment in key components that will improve our stock and increase the number of decent homes.

Q: Is there a limit on how much the Council can borrow to invest in the stock?

A: Borrowing for investment in our stock is governed by the CIPFA Prudential Code. Essentially this means that borrowing is limited to a level that can reasonably be afforded from future rental income. Our business plan work will establish our future borrowing capacity.

Q: Does the budget allocate funds to develop new housing, such as on our garage sites

A: There is no capital provision for development in the budget for 2025/26. There is however an ambition to build and buy new homes. This ambition will be set out in a 5 year Housing Investment and Development Plan which will follow on from the business planning process.

Q: What impact has the Stock Condition Survey (SCS) had on the budget.

A: The headline results from the stock condition survey have confirmed our understanding of the works needed to upgrade our stock. These are reflected in our stated investment priorities for housing in 2025/26. A more detailed analysis of the SCS will assist with the business planning and longer term strategic investment plans.

Q. Are we selling any stock to fund capital investment.

A: There are no specific plans to sell houses to generate capital receipts. The Council will however dispose of a limited number of poor performing assets where the cost of repairs significantly exceeds the future rental income. This is good practice and in line with the recently adopted Acquisitions & Disposals Policy. Any receipts will be available to fund the capital programme.

Q: Does the budget address decarbonisation.

A: The budget includes resources to deliver major improvements and fabric upgrades which contribute to thermal efficiency. There is also specific funding to complete the LAD project which includes thermal improvements, heating upgrades and solar PV installations. A longer term strategic plan for decarbonisation will be considered through the business plan process currently underway.

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting 8 January 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



East Devon National Landscape Management Plan consultation

Report summary:

East Devon District Council together with other local authorities has previously authorised the East Devon National Landscape Partnership to undertake a review of the National Landscape (AONB) Management Plan by December 31st 2026, as required under Section IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

The review process is well underway; key issues, new challenges and opportunities have been identified, including through stakeholder engagement, and approval is now sought for public consultation on a draft of the reviewed Plan to take place during February and March 2025. This will inform any changes to be made and once finalised the revised Management Plan will be recommended by the National Landscape Partnership for adoption by each of the local authorities by the end of July 2025.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That Cabinet agrees to the East Devon National Landscape Partnership undertaking public consultation on the reviewed East Devon National Landscape Management Plan for 2025-2030.

Reason for recommendation:

To enable the East Devon National Landscape Partnership to carry out the consultation on the reviewed East Devon National Landscape Management Plan. East Devon District Council, with other local authorities, has authorised the East Devon National Landscape Partnership to review the Management Plan on their behalf. Consultation is a standard component of statutory Plan preparation, involving a consultation period during which consultees, including the public, can comment on the draft Plan.

Officer: Daniel Wynn, Manager – East Devon National Landscape, email daniel.wynn@eastdevon-nl.org.uk or telephone 01404 642027; Charlie Plowden, Assistant Director – Countryside & Leisure, cplowden@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☒ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☒ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination

- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Economy
- ☐ Finance and Assets
- ☒ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ A supported and engaged community
 - ☒ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☐ Financially secure and improving quality of services
-

Report in full

- 1.1 Under Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, East Devon District Council, together with other local authorities is required to produce a Management Plan for the East Devon AONB (now known as National Landscape) and review it at intervals of not more than five years (exceptionally, Defra authorised a 12-month extension to the review of the current Plan). Along with the other relevant local authorities, East Devon District Council has authorised the East Devon National Landscape Partnership to perform this duty on its behalf; this work is co-ordinated by the National Landscape team
- 1.2 The CROW Act (and as amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023) and guidance from Natural England provides advice on the scale, nature and content of Management Plans. A Management Plan should serve to highlight a shared long term vision for the National Landscape and contain ambitions, targets and actions that seek to further the statutory purpose, i.e. to conserve and enhance the designated AONB. The delivery of the Plan will be subject to availability of funding from Defra, the local authorities, and other parties.
- 1.3 The Partnership has taken the opportunity to undertake a more thorough review than in the previous cycle to ensure that the Plan remains fit for purpose and up to date. The Plan is expected to contribute to Government's Environmental Improvement Plan (including targets) and it is important to make sure it addresses the significant issues of the climate emergency and nature recovery, taking account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Plans and local authority climate action plans
- 1.4 To help identify important matters and considerations for inclusion, discussions and workshops have been held with key partners, Partnership Management Group, and representatives of partnership organisations, in advance of a wider public consultation on a draft reviewed plan.
- 1.5 Public consultation on the Draft Plan for 2025-30 is proposed to take place in February to March (8 weeks). Details of specific promotion and engagement opportunities during that

period are still being planned to ensure that there are opportunities for public engagement in commenting on the development of the Plan. A suggestion to present the draft Management Plan has been raised with the Chair of overview Committee in March (along with the Blackdown Hills National Landscape) to give Councillors the opportunity to comment and understand the emerging key issues and themes. Further to the public consultation period, the Draft Plan will be revised and a final draft version will undergo formal consultation with the statutory consultee, Natural England. Following this, the Management Plan will be finalised and recommended by the National Landscape Partnership to the Council (and the other relevant local authorities) for adoption as the statutory Management Plan for the East Devon National Landscape.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the report.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report (Legal/ALW/25.11/lken 002545)

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting 8 January 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



EDDC Culture Strategy 2022-2031 support

Report summary:

Since the creation and adoption of the Council's Culture Strategy 2022-2031 a significant amount of progress has happened with the appointment of the Council's Cultural Producer to drive the Strategy's 10-year Delivery Plan forward. The setting up of the Arts Culture East Devon (ACED) network has now attracted over 200 local cultural and creative organisations across the district that is helping to drive community engagement, social capital, pathways for young creatives, engaging in Placemaking schemes and boosting the local economies of our towns and rural areas. This has been supplemented with the funding received from the UK SPF and our cultural programme which has enabled an acceleration of many of our priority areas in the Culture Strategy. The UK SPF has also helped to set up the Creative East Devon Fund which is a competitive application process open to all the District's local creative and cultural organisations within the ACED network to develop and grow their work.

The UK SPF has also supported the initial development of Screen Devon and its business plan for establishing opportunities for inward investment from the film industry into the county. However the uncertainty surrounding the future of the UK SPF and the Council's role in shaping its delivery programmes including culture has meant the critical "lifeline" of seed funding into many grassroots creative and cultural organisations as well as supporting new initiatives such as Screen Devon that have the potential to boost East Devon's local economy are now in jeopardy. The UK SPF has created significant momentum for much of the cultural activities supported by the Council and provided important match funding for new initiatives and programmes bringing in important funding leverage from outside the Council.

The Council Plan has identified the value and importance of its cultural programmes and events within its current Council Plan and how it can help to shape areas such as place making, enable community cohesion and support our local economies with job creation and apprenticeships into the creative and arts sector.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☐ No ☒

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That Cabinet resolves:

1. To approve the support of the Screen Devon scheme and its supporting Key Performance Indicators by granting additional funding of £10,000 for the 2025/26 financial year as set out in the report;
2. To approve the support of the Villages in Action programme and its supporting Key Performance Indicators by granting additional funding of £5,000 (in addition to the existing annual contribution of £10,000) for the 2025/26 financial year to support the recruitment of a new Network Lead in East Devon.

3. That Cabinet recommends to Council that an additional budget of £15,000 is provided from the Council's General Fund Revenue account to fund the recommendations to provide additional funding of £10,000 to Screen Devon and additional funding of £5,000 to Villages in Action as set out in recommendations 1 and 2.

Reason for recommendation:

By continuing to financially support these two organisations EDDC is progressing in the delivery of the [East Devon Cultural Strategy](#), in particular:

- Strengthening and Supporting 'the-people-that-do'
- Cultural Tourism
- Creative Enterprise and Skills
- Connectivity
- Cultural Leadership

Supporting these two organisations will help us reach our strategy goals. These are that by 2031:

1. East Devon's cultural offer is perceived by residents as high quality, interesting, fun, relevant, accessible and well-promoted
2. Residents who have taken part in cultural activity feel that their health, happiness and wellbeing have improved as a result
3. Children and young people across the district feel they have ample opportunities to take part in cultural and creative activities
4. More people work in the cultural and creative industries in East Devon, backed up by more training, skills and pathways to employment
5. Cultural organisations, artists and creative businesses feel connected, resilient and creatively ambitious (professional and voluntary sectors)
6. Investment into arts, museums and heritage through earned income, grants, sponsorship and philanthropy has increased
7. The number and diversity of visitors, audiences and participants in culture and creative activity in East Devon has increased
8. Culture is helping to tackle the climate emergency

Officer: Sarah Elghady, Cultural Producer Sarah.Elghady@eastdevon.gov.uk; Charlie Plowden, Assistant Director – Countryside & Leisure, CPlowden@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☒ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☒ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☒ Economy
- ☐ Finance and Assets
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☒ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Medium Risk; The uncertainty of the future of the UK SPF has meant that a number of programmes of activity such as the cultural programme are potentially unlikely now to continue beyond the final year of 2024/25. The funding that has been received over the last three years has been crucial to support the delivery of multiple priority outputs and outcomes from the Council's Culture Strategy 2022-2031.

Links to background information [East Devon Cultural Strategy](#) ; [The Advantage of Establishing a Regional Screen Agency for Devon - Research Report Salas_2023-1116 \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#); [ACED Directory](#);

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
 - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☒ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☐ Financially secure and improving quality of services
-

Report in full

1. Screen Devon scheme 2025/26

1.1 Screen Devon emerged out of a two year research project at Exeter University to promote the region's capabilities and develop the local screen industry. It's goals are to improve Devon's prosperity potential, raise the profile of Devon's talent, culture and landscapes, and to ensure that growth was equitably distributed and fair.

1.2 Screen agencies are ordinarily governmental organisations, but this is difficult in Devon due to the number of local authorities in the region and the scale that a screen agency needs to work to. Screen Devon is independent and able to work easily across boundaries to the benefit of all.

1.3 At the Council's Arts and Culture Forum meeting in November 2024 the following points were discussed:

- The estimated market capture of UK productions.
- The South West is the largest English region but only had one film and TV studio, located in Bristol.
- Public service broadcasters are required to base more TV productions in the regions.
- East Devon would benefit from productions based in other Devon local authorities and vice versa, based on the average travel time radius of an hour, which is what is looked at for locations to shoot around a base.
- There is a lot of talent in film making in Devon.
- Eight areas of action:
 - Profile building.
 - Economy.
 - Jobs.
 - Education.
 - Champion screen culture.
 - Sustainability and equality.
 - Research.
 - Future facing.

1.4 Initial funding would be from other Devon district councils (6 out of 10 have committed so far), Devon County Council, Exeter Culture, Plymouth Culture and the University of Exeter.

1.5 A request was made for a £10,000 contribution from East Devon DC towards the £72,000 core funding for 2025/26. Screen Devon is a five to ten year project that would take time to build capacity, profile and reputation. It would help to make sure that East Devon benefitted from the national growth of the film and TV sector. It was reported that medium budget feature film would spend £66,000 per day in a local region. The Forum noted that Screen Cornwall figures revealed that film and TV production was worth £5m to the local economy.

1.6 The Forum agreed that Screen Devon was an excellent idea and a fantastic opportunity for the area. It would help to keep creative people in Devon. Tourism in the area would also benefit as well as local employment and arts education.

1.7 The contribution of £10,000 from East Devon DC this year from the UK SPF has been put towards the hire of a General Manager and Officer, who will begin in January 2025.

1.8 Screen Devon – KPIs (2025 – 2026)

KPI 1: Screen Devon will offer one training or skills development workshop for up to **10 people** seeking pathways into the creative Industries, in East Devon.

KPI 2: Screen Devon will host one in-person networking event for Cultural organisations, artists and creative businesses based in East Devon with the opportunity to access 1-to-1 mentoring from industry experts: up to **5 mentoring sessions and 25 attendees**.

KPI 3: Screen Devon will deliver a session to demystify Green Film production and help understand industry-standard Green Policies. **1 workshop for 8 people**

1.9 These goals align with the cultural strategy by ensuring cultural organisations, artists and creative businesses feel connected, resilient and creatively ambitious, it also addresses the goal of more people working in the cultural and creative industries in East Devon, backed up by more training, skills and pathways to employment as well as increasing the number and diversity of visitors, audiences and participants in culture and creative activity in East Devon.

2 Villages in Action (ViA) programme

2.1 Villages in Action (ViA) was established in 2001 to bring live performance, arts and cultural events to rural communities across Devon. For over two decades ViA have worked alongside communities to grow opportunities for Devon's towns and villages to host a whole range of excellent creative work – across dance, theatre, music, circus, spoken word, poetry, visual arts and more.

2.2 Since 2021, ViA have embarked on a new journey – to shift the way they think about rural touring in Devon. With their network of promoters and co-curators, they are reimagining the way communities create and welcome new work and the people who make it.

2.3 Through their [Agri]Culture model, ViA aim to strengthen the voice of our towns and villages in both hosting and creating work that reflects our changing communities and the wider world. At its heart, this model is about making work together, and making work happen together. Participatory activities, artist residencies and creative skills opportunities run alongside invitations to host and see visiting performances. ViA's aim is that, over time, this culturally driven action-network will grow meaningful social & cultural capital within rural communities.

2.4 Villages in Action (ViA) is seeking an uplift of £5,000 to the annual contribution from the Council which is currently £10,000 (an amount that has remained the same since 2010) to support the recruitment of a [Agri] Culture Network Lead in East Devon.

2.5 The aims of this role:

- To galvanise the East Devon network - to act as a local support for new promoters and members of the network, offering on the ground support for first-time events, risk assessment and other event management training.
- To represent Villages in Action at co-creation meetings with partners, wider networking events, meeting representatives from other organisations to better collaborate, plan and co-design shared projects with a focus on community-based asset development.
- To offer paid employment opportunities, and a chance to grow the team in line with our longer-term ambitions to grow the East Devon hub of Villages in Action.

2.6 Engagement details:

- 24 days a year (April 2025- March 2026)
- £5000/year based on £120-£175/day freelance rate + expenses for travel and expenses

2.7 Villages in Action - KPIs (2025/26)

KPI 1: To develop 2 new strategic partnerships with at least 4 new East Devon based organisations, with a minimum of 2 collaborative funding bid submissions for shared project work.

- This addresses the East Devon Cultural Strategy goal to increase investment into arts, museums and heritage through earned income, grants, sponsorship and philanthropy as well ensuring cultural organisations, artists and creative businesses feel connected, resilient and creatively ambitious.

KPI 2: To provide 2 new paid freelance opportunities for East Devon residents for the network in East Devon, and direct Continuing Professional Development for up to 15 East Devon based volunteers in Event Management, Risk Assessment, Impact and Evaluation and Artist Support.

- This addresses the East Devon Cultural Strategy goal of more people working in the cultural and creative industries in East Devon, backed up by more training, skills and pathways to employment.

2.8 The opportunity to help support and scale up the level of rural touring programmes across East Devon through ViA with a modest investment is based on a proven track record of delivery and a robust framework of review and evaluation that is presented to the Council's Arts & Culture Forum on an annual basis to ensure it is achieving the desired outcomes and KPIs.

Financial implications:

The 25/26 draft budget is being prepared and presented and explains the significant challenges upon the general fund in year to maintain a balanced budget and also explains the remaining uncertainties with regards to central government assistance at this time. Although the additional funding of £15k being requested here is not overly material in this regard, these financial pressures should be considered when approving any additional budget that has not already been included within the 25/26 budget papers and then be compared with the potential benefits/merits that each project will bring to the council or region.

Legal implications:

Legal time will be needed to prepare and complete grant funding agreements for the two projects. There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting 8 January 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



Draft EDDC Housing Strategy

Report summary:

This report presents our draft Housing Strategy, which Members are asked to approve to go out to consultation for 11 weeks, before a final draft is produced and presented in summer 2025.

The strategy seeks to focus our resources on four key strategic areas which we aim to deliver on over the next 5 years.

Objective 1: Delivering person-centred housing services

Objective 2: Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Objective 3: Improving the standard of homes and communities

Objective 4: Increasing the supply of homes

A detailed delivery action plan will sit alongside the strategy to track and demonstrate our achievements against these objectives.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That members approve the attached draft (including any amendments agreed at this meeting) for public consultation beginning in January 2025.

Reason for recommendation:

The draft strategy sets out our intended direction for the delivery of housing related services across the council for the next 5 years. We would like to seek the views of the public, external agencies and others before finalising our approach.

Officer: Catrin Stark, cstark@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☒ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Economy
- ☐ Finance and Assets

- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☒ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Medium Impact

Risk: Low Risk; failure to develop a co-ordinated approach to how we deliver housing services may lead to reduced performance quality and the risk of not meeting statutory requirements

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
 - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services
-

Report in full

- 1.1 Our current housing strategy runs until the end of 2024, and work has begun on the production of a new strategy for 2025 – 2030.
- 1.2 The refreshed strategy aims to reflect the integral role that EDDC has in relation to housing in the district and the role that housing has on the health and wellbeing of residents. It will cover areas such as housing supply and standards, and tackling homelessness, as well as focusing on how we can deliver person-centred housing services.
- 1.3 The draft strategy and action plan are attached as appendices to this report.
- 1.4 We have identified the following four objectives, established following initial internal consultation and good practice from other authorities. These are:
 - Delivering person-centred housing services
 - Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
 - Improving the standard of Homes and Communities
 - Increasing the supply of homes.
- 1.5 For each objective we have outlined a number of actions that we will take to meet that objective. These are set out as quite high level actions within the strategy, with more detailed activities contained within a separate live action plan that will be maintained and reported on periodically (to be agreed with Members).
- 1.6 The majority of the actions identified within the Action plan for the first year reflect existing goals set out in existing strategies, the Council Plan, the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy, and departmental service plans. Note that these are subject to further consultation.

Consultation

- 1.7 We have carried out initial consultation with internal departments. Housing Association contacts and Health and Social care partners at Devon County Council have also been approached for their thoughts on what they would like to be included within the housing strategy. We intend to carry out further discussions with partners throughout the public consultation period.
- 1.8 We aim to begin formal public consultation on 13th January 2025 (following the January Cabinet meeting). This is planned to be conducted using Commonplace in line with corporate expectations. We are looking for this consultation to run for 11 weeks from 13th January until 28th March 2025.
- 1.9 We will hold a consultation session for Members alongside the public consultation. Members are also invited to offer feedback directly through the public consultation platform.
- 1.10 We are working with our Community Development to organise consultation events with council tenants, potentially through existing community hub events.

Next Steps

- 1.11 Following consultation, we aim to present our final strategy document to Overview Committee in April, before taking to Cabinet in May and onto Full Council in June/July 2025. This is subject to meeting dates for next year being confirmed.

Recommendation

- 1.12 That members approve the attached draft (including any amendments agreed at this meeting) for public consultation beginning in January 2025.

Financial implications:

There is not a request for additional budgets and no recommendation is being made for members to consider. Any specific actions that require additional budget will have to be presented to members separately for consideration if such circumstances arise.

Legal implications:

The Council is legally required to have a Housing Strategy. This report presents a draft to members for public consultation.




East Devon District Council Housing Strategy 2025-2030

Contact details

Housing Strategy, Enabling and Projects
East Devon District Council
Blackdown House, Border Road, Heathpark Industrial Estate,
Honiton, EX14 1EJ
DX 48808 Honiton

01404 515616 [change to department phone number if appropriate]

eastdevon.gov.uk [add subdomain if appropriate]

   eastdevon

To request this information in a different
format or language phone 01404 515616
or go to eastdevon.gov.uk/contact

Foreword

TBC

Introduction

Housing plays a critical role in nearly every aspect of life, providing stability, security, and a foundation for well-being. Safe, affordable housing supports physical and mental health, allows for better educational and employment opportunities, and fosters a sense of belonging and community.

For individuals, it offers a place of refuge and stability, reducing the risks of illness, stress, and social isolation. For communities, good housing promotes social cohesion, economic growth, and neighbourhood safety. It helps create vibrant, resilient communities where people can thrive, enhancing the overall quality of life and reducing social inequalities.

In today's world, where health challenges are becoming increasingly complex, the connection between housing and wellbeing has never been clearer. A healthy home can prevent illness, support recovery, and promote mental wellness, while poor housing conditions can cause and exacerbate poor health and limit life opportunities.

By seeing housing as a crucial element of public health and social equality, we can work to ensure that everyone can live in a space that supports their wellbeing and allows them to thrive. This strategy lays the groundwork for us to achieve this goal.

The role of the council in housing

East Devon District Council is an integral part of the local housing framework of the district. Working together with other agencies, charities, businesses, and members of the public, teams across the council are involved in delivering many housing-related services.

We are a social landlord, with over 4,000 properties across the district. We provide around two thirds of all social and affordable rented housing across the district, alongside local and national Housing Associations.

As a Strategic Planning Authority, we are required to develop a Local Plan which guides and informs decisions on all aspects of development. This includes the distribution of new housing across the district, the split of tenure, the level of affordable housing and the provision of specialist accommodation such as Sheltered and Extra Care Housing.

We offer guidance and support to private sector landlords and homeowners on issues relating to environmental health, as well as having enforcement powers to tackle breaches in this area where we have been unable to successfully engage with them.

We also have statutory obligations in respect of tackling homelessness and rough sleeping and are very proud of our work in this area. We work collaboratively with partner agencies, charities and voluntary organisations to help those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness into safe, and stable accommodation. With a focus on prevention and early intervention, our support services aim to ensure that periods of homelessness are fleeting and focussed on positive outcomes for every affected individual. We also offer a rent deposit scheme to enable households to access the private sector rented market.

Our Financial Resilience Team work to support households in our community who are undergoing economic hardship, supporting them into accommodation through Discretionary Housing Payments and Council tax support. The team also help with budgeting and life skills in partnership with partner organisations.

This Housing Strategy seeks to pull together all these elements in addition to our general housing stock and various supporting services to highlight and co-ordinate our efforts to deliver on four key strategic objectives for the benefit of current and future residents of East Devon.

Local Context

Our District



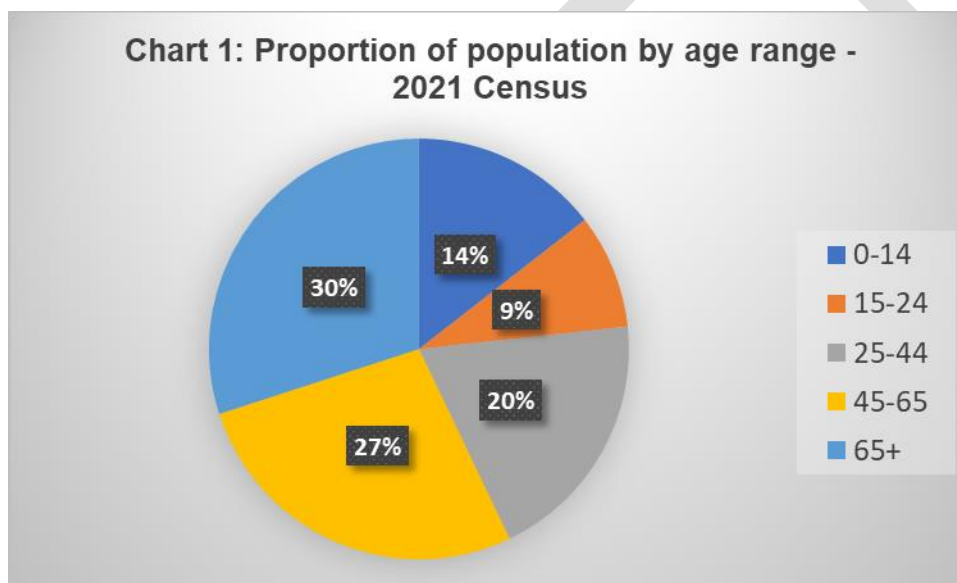
The East Devon District covers an area of 813 square kilometres and comprises the area between the River Exe and outskirts of Exeter to the west, Somerset (inland) and Dorset to the east. At the extremes, the district stretches 30 miles east to west and 15 miles north to south. East Devon is one of eight Devon districts.

The rural nature of the district is emphasised by the low population density which is 185.5 per square kilometre hectare (England and Wales average is 433.5). The district has 68 Town and Parish Councils. Our main settlements comprise the coastal resorts of Exmouth, Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth and Seaton and, in the mainly rural inland area, the towns of Honiton, Ottery St Mary, and Axminster. We also have a new town, Cranbrook, in the west of the district that is due to expand further over the next few years, and plans for a second new community are currently being developed.

Population

In 2021 the mid-year population estimates put East Devon's population at 152,120. This is a rise of 19,663 (6%) from the last census figure in 2011.

In East Devon, we have an older population when compared to the national average. The median age here is close to 51, which is 10 years higher than the national figure and 57% of our population are over 45 years old. Our district continues to face numerous impacts associated with an ageing population, including an increased demand for health and social care services, the need to provide age-appropriate housing that enables people to live in their own homes for longer, and deliver sufficient residential and Extra Care housing for when fully independent living is no longer possible.



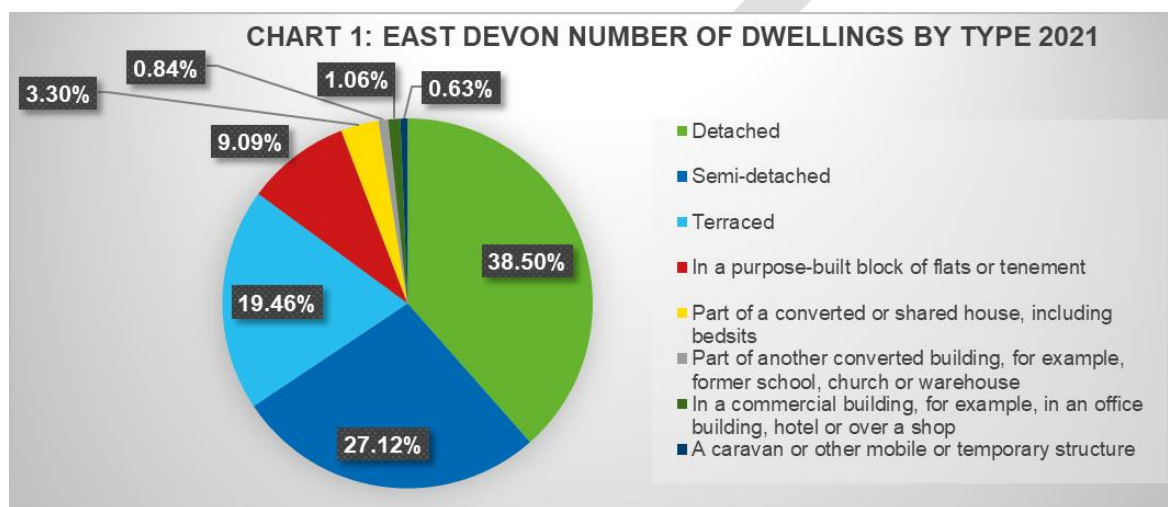
Life expectancy for residents of East Devon is the highest of all Devon districts (just over 82 years) and is in the top 10% nationally.

Most East Devon residents are from a white British background, with just 5.8% coming from another ethnic background. In recent years, we have seen a significant increase of inward migration of refugees fleeing conflict and persecution. We've welcomed over 500 Ukrainian citizens, along with families from Afghanistan, Hong Kong and other countries placed here through central government programmes.

Overall, the district is relatively well-off and is in the 40% least deprived districts nationally; it is also one of the lowest crime rate areas in Britain. However, there are pockets within the district where deprivation is high.

Housing in East Devon

The 2021 census figures show there were 66,786 dwellings listed in East Devon see Chart 1 below for breakdown by dwelling type.



The vast majority of dwellings are either houses or bungalows and most of these - over 25,700 - are detached.

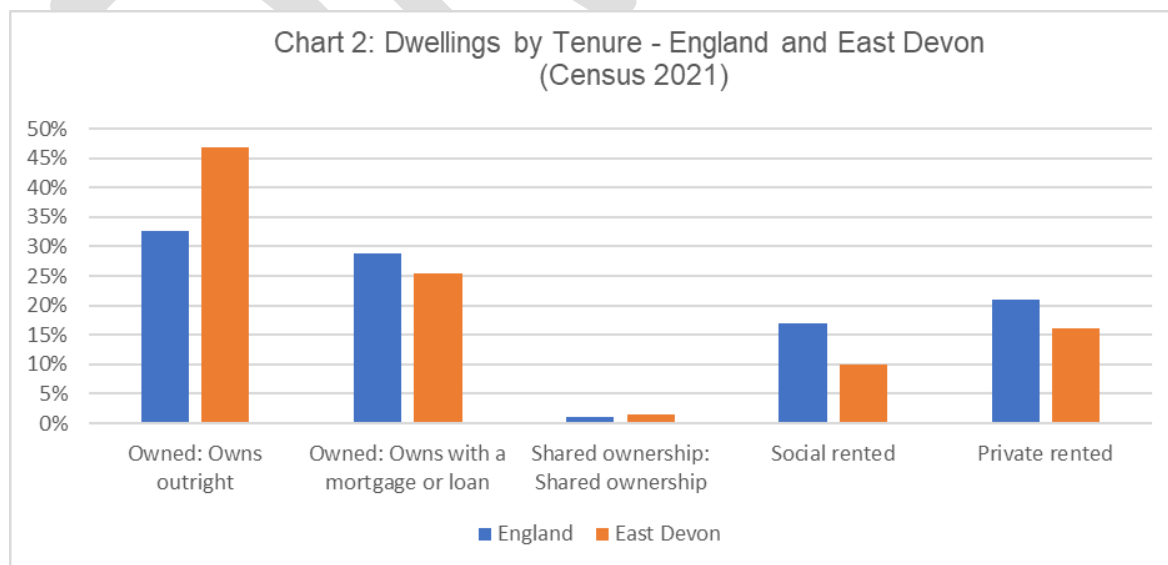


Chart 2 above shows the split of dwellings by tenure. The proportion of owner-occupied homes in East Devon is quite high at 72%, compared to the national average of 62%. Of these 47% are owned outright, compared to 33% nationally.

Of those homes that are not owner occupied, 26% of the homes are rented, with 10% defined as social rented housing (17% national average) and 16% privately rented (21% nationally).

The number of empty residential properties, short and long term, increased since 2018. According to council tax records, in October 2024 there were 215 properties which had been empty for at least 6 months, and the number of those empty for at least 1 year was 136. There were also 2,760 homes designated as second homes.

As at April 2023, East Devon District Council currently owns two thirds of all social housing stock (4165 properties). 2821 of these are classified as general needs properties, and 1344 are sheltered properties where residents have access to alarm and support services through our Home Safeguard Service. The remaining social housing stock is provided by 11 Housing Associations with roughly 2650 homes in East Devon.

EDDC is a partner of Devon Home Choice, alongside Housing Associations and the other councils in Devon to manage the fair and transparent allocation of social housing for local residents registered on the scheme.

Affordability

[House price to workplace-based earnings ratio - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

| Area | House Prices | Earnings | Affordability |
|------------|--------------|----------|---------------|
| England | £290,000 | £35,106 | 8.26 |
| South West | £310,000 | £33,450 | 9.27 |
| East Devon | £350,000 | £35,058 | 9.98 |

Private rent levels are amongst the highest in Devon, and they have risen considerably in the last three years. Between 2021/22 and 2023/24 the price of renting one and two bed properties has increased by 12%, with even greater increases in larger properties (18% for three beds, and 26% for four beds)..

Table 3 – Monthly average private rent costs by bedroom size

| Year | 1 bed | 2 bed | 3 bed | 4 bed |
|-------|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| 21/22 | £550.00 | £725.00 | £870.00 | £1,195.00 |
| 22/23 | £535.00 | £700.00 | £895.00 | £1,250.00 |
| 23/24 | £616.00 | £812.00 | £1,025.00 | £1,508.00 |

The Local Housing Allowance rates – the maximum standard amount that the housing element of Universal Credit will provided towards rental costs - are insufficient to meet the average private rent level in the district, further emphasising the lack of affordable housing available for those on low incomes.

Table 4 – comparison of average private rent figures from Sept 24 with current Local Housing Allowance rates

| | Studio/room | 1 Bed | 2 Bed | 3 Bed | 4+Bed |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| LHA Rate 2024/25 | £404.11 | £529.99 | £684.98 | £824.99 | £1,100.00 |
| September 2024 average rent | £450.00 | £621.00 | £816.00 | £1,030.00 | £1,504.00 |
| Shortfall | £45.89 | £91.01 | £131.02 | £205.01 | £404.00 |

Key Objectives

Set out below are the four key objectives around which our work will be focused.

Objective 1: Delivering person-centred housing services

Objective 2: Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Objective 3: Improving the standard of homes and communities

Objective 4: Increasing the supply of homes

In many ways, these objectives are interlinked. The fundamental impact that housing can have on health and wellbeing is the driver for ensuring that everyone has access to a home, that those homes are of good quality, safe and secure, and that we have sufficient affordable housing of all tenures to meet the individual needs of our residents.

Objective 1: Delivering Person-centred housing services.

By engaging with our customers through pro-active communication and consultation, we believe we can shape services that improve people's enjoyment of their home and communities and as a result feel happier and healthier. Whilst meeting every need may not be possible, we are committed to seeing each of our customers as individuals and will endeavour to work with them to plan their support and engage them in shaping our service delivery.

Meeting the objective

Customer Engagement

- We will ensure all staff are trained in Trauma Informed Practice
- We will provide individual assessment of need to all people referred to housing support services
- We will engage with all customers on changes to policy and procedure
- We will support our Tenant Involvement Group to improve their reach and ensure their voice is heard at Housing Review Board and wider council levels, in line with our Resident Involvement Strategy.

- We will complete Tenant Satisfaction Measure Surveys on a quarterly basis to enable more agile timely responses to live issues.
- We will consult with tenants and housing associations on a revised Tenancy Strategy which places an emphasis on support for tenants to improve their health and wellbeing.
- We will review and update our website to make it easier for residents to access information about housing services.
- We will develop a digital inclusion programme, including training and access to computers for our tenants.
- We will continue to engage with tenants on all matters relating to the delivery of our council housing, including longer term strategic planning and the best use of our existing housing stock.

Independent living and supported housing

- We will deliver our Private Sector Housing Financial Assistance policy to provide loans and grants for home improvements and adaptations to residents' homes in the private sector through the Better Care Fund and Disabled Facilities Grants
- We will work with tenants alongside care and support providers to deliver suitable aids and adaptations to council properties.
- We will work with Devon County Council to develop a Supported Housing Strategy in response to the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 to establish current supply and demand for supported housing
- We will set up a new licensing scheme for supported housing in line with guidelines set out by MHCLG in response to the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023
- We will set out requirements for the development of Extra Care facilities and/or Residential care homes for older people, particularly in larger developments.
- We will carry out a review of our sheltered housing stock to identify opportunities for repurposing, regenerating and improving our offer to older residents.
- We will implement the upgrade of our Home Safeguard systems, embracing the latest technology to offer increased independence for vulnerable customers.

- We will work with partners to develop a range of assistive technologies to ensure access to services for those who would otherwise struggle to receive them.

Promote and support healthy living

- We will ensure that our housing staff receive relevant training in relation to health matters to support tenants and prospective tenants.
- We will strengthen links with Devon County Council Adult Social Care and Health teams to better respond to the needs of tenants and prospective tenants.
- We will work in partnership with external agencies to support people fleeing domestic abuse.
- We will seek to support households experiencing overcrowding into more suitable accommodation.
- We will engage with landlords who allow overcrowding in their accommodation and will use enforcement where necessary.
- We will look to reduce social isolation through community development events and signposting to existing activities in the wider community.
- We will seek to offer support to residents experiencing fuel poverty.
- We will provide support to resettling refugees into our communities

• Objective 2: Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

We have already established the multiple benefits of safe and stable accommodation for people's health and wellbeing. People who are suffering with homelessness and rough sleeping are likely to receive none of these positive outcomes, often through no fault of their own. There is no single profile of a 'homeless person'; it can affect both individuals and families.

Several factors can increase vulnerability to homelessness. Personal circumstances such as poor physical or mental health, substance abuse issues, bereavement, or involvement in the care or criminal justice system can all play a role in someone finding themselves homeless, but often it is external factors like poverty, inequality, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, and welfare or income policies can further aggravate the situation.

As a local authority we have a legal responsibility to prevent and relieve homelessness and we are committed to achieving this. The impact of homelessness on individuals can be severe. It can worsen existing challenges and increase the likelihood of developing mental health issues, physical health problems, or substance abuse disorders. Given the proven link between stable housing and improved health and wellbeing, it is not only a legal responsibility but also a moral and social imperative to do what we can to alleviate and prevent homelessness.

Our Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy sets out how we aim to tackle this issue head on, with objectives on ending rough sleeping, maximising prevention activities and increasing the range of accommodation solutions for those impacted by homelessness.

Meeting the objective

- We will take a trauma informed approach to supporting individuals approaching our homelessness service.
- We will consider expanding our Housing First programme to assist the most vulnerable homeless people into stable accommodation and to access support from external agencies.
- We will utilise our Rent Deposit and Bond Scheme to assist homeless households into accommodation.
- Our Private Sector Liaison Officers will support homeless households into private rented accommodation and landlords requiring assistance where there are tenancy issues to prevent evictions.
- We will provide outreach to identify and assist those sleeping rough, providing early intervention to help people back into secure and stable accommodation.
- We will seek to develop a landlord forum to support landlords with carrying out their landlord functions and to encourage participation in supporting homeless households.
- We will develop a tenancy sustainment support service for both tenants and landlords.
- We will submit bids for additional funding to support and strengthen homelessness prevention and rough sleeping activities.
- We will continue to work with partner organisations to provide a range of support to secure and sustain tenancies.

Objective 3: Improving the standard of homes and communities.

Homes

In recent years there have been a number of high-profile national incidents around the quality of accommodation in both social and private sector housing, but we also know that there are also too many people in our district who live in substandard housing. They might be living in private rented accommodation or social rented housing (including our own council properties) but some homeowners are also suffering with issues including insufficient heating, insulation, and damp and mould in their homes.

This situation must be improved, and urgently. That's why we are making it our mission to drive through improvements in housing standards across both the rented and owned sectors. In our role as a social landlord there is legislation and minimum standards that we must meet. Our private sector housing team work with private landlords and homeowners by providing guidance, access to loans and other support. However, they also have legal powers to require improvements where there is a real need.

Communities

We are committed to doing our part to foster vibrant, friendly communities across East Devon. We want our housing estates to be clean, tidy and safe for residents, with help and support available for those who are vulnerable. We are aware that anti-social Behaviour (ASB) can be an issue in some areas, though levels in East Devon are perhaps lower than in other parts of the country.

We need to find ways to reduce ASB in our communities. We are an active member in East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership with the police and other agencies. We also employ Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour Officers who work with the community to resolve ASB issues and take enforcement action when necessary. This can be achieved through a program of regeneration of our estates. We want to instil a sense of pride in our estates and communities by delivering improved community facilities, sprucing up our open spaces and providing space for community led activities and events, all done in partnership with local people and businesses.

How we will meet the objective

Safe and healthy housing

- We will undertake investigations, visits and enforcement regarding housing conditions, particularly targeting damp and mould, and excess cold or heat in the rented sector.
- Will provide advice and support to homeowners, landlords and tenants in respect of actions they can take to decrease the risk of damp and mould in their homes.
- We will work with landlords to encourage them to undertake remedial works to rental properties where required to ensure that they meet or exceed minimum standards.
- We will seek to establish links with health professionals and other partners in relation to damp and mould and other poor housing conditions, to encourage them or their patients to contact us for support in tackling any housing issues.
- We will invest in our own housing stock to ensure that all our properties meet or exceed the Decent Homes Standard.
- In line with Awaab's law, we will continue to prioritise repairs and maintenance work in council properties to resolve and prevent damp and mould in our properties.
- We will work with our contractors to ensure that our repairs and maintenance service delivers an improved responsive repairs service to our tenants.
- We will develop a longer-term asset management and planned works programme to maintain and upgrade our housing stock in line with new requirements and expectations.

Meeting net zero aspirations

- We will seek to deliver targeted energy efficiency upgrades to our own houses and will work with other social landlords to improve the energy efficiency of all social housing stock in the district.
- We will identify and bid for grant funding to help deliver energy efficiency and retrofit improvements to our social housing.
- We will help residents to access grants and loans to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, including insulation, solar panels and heat pumps.
- We will work with planners and developers to increase energy efficiency standards in new properties.

Supporting and improving communities

- We will develop a strategy for regenerating our estates, with resident inclusion at its core.
- We will work with both internal and external partners to deliver grants and cost-of-living funds to residents in most need of financial support.
- We will work in partnership with the police and other key stakeholders to tackle anti-social behaviour on our estates.
- We will explore how we can maximise the use of our community centres to support all households living on our estates.
- We will review our sheltered housing provision to ensure that it continues to provide a safe and secure environment for older people with support needs.

Objective 4: Increasing the supply of homes.

We know that there isn't enough of the right housing in East Devon. Our most recent local housing needs assessment has identified the need for over 18,000 new properties to be delivered by 2040 to meet existing and future needs. The social housing register for East Devon, Devon Home Choice, currently has almost 6,000 people on the waiting list for social housing, 3,000 of them with a current housing need. A recent Devon Housing Commission report provides substantial evidence that the county is in the midst of a housing crisis.

We are already working to address this; our emerging Local Plan aims to deliver around 22,000 additional new homes between now and 2042 with over 4,000 of these to be classed as affordable housing. This housing has to be built in the right places, considering how homes can link to sustainable transport and employment options, but also take into the account the needs of more rural communities to provide affordable housing that will enable young people to stay in the area, thus maintaining and enriching those communities. We will need to consider actions that we can take both in facilitating delivery by Housing Associations and Community Land Trusts as well as how we as a landlord can contribute to this aspiration.

Discussions are currently ongoing regarding the creation of a Devon and Torbay Combined Council Authority. This would provide a formal and legal basis for joint working between both the County Council, Torbay Council and the eight district

councils across Devon and deliver additional funding and powers to make improvements in the local community. This would include the provision of housing across the whole county, which should provide more opportunities for our district to deliver more affordable housing for local people.

As well as new homes, our strategy will need to address how we make best use of existing housing. In October 2023 there were 312 homes that had been empty for more than 6 months. We need to take action to bring these empty homes back into use. We know that there is limited social housing across the district, so we need to make sure that this is allocated efficiently, by minimising instances of overcrowding and under-occupation.

How we will meet the objective

Deliver more affordable homes.

- We will work with Community Land Trusts to deliver affordable housing in rural communities for the local population through financial assistance packages to support the production of Housing Needs Assessments and exploratory surveys, as well as capital investment.
- We will work with developers and our planning department to secure new affordable housing delivery in line with local plan expectations and ensure that infrastructure around developments is in place to enable communities to access vital facilities and thrive.
- We will work with the CCA and Homes England to secure investment in affordable housing within East Devon.
- We will produce a Housing Investment and Delivery Plan that will define how we intend to deliver more Council housing to meet the needs of households across the district.
- We will support other social landlords to deliver more affordable homes across the district.
- We will explore opportunities for affordable housing for key workers.
- We will lobby central government for more flexibilities to maximise opportunities for, and investment in, the development of affordable housing.
- We will consider the development of alternative and innovative affordable housing solutions.
- We will seek to utilise commuted sums to maximise affordable housing delivery across the district.

- We will work with planning and advocates for the Gypsy and Traveller community to ensure that we meet their housing needs.
- We will support Government initiatives for the provision of housing for refugees.

Make best use of existing housing

- We will implement our refreshed Empty Homes Strategy to bring long term empty homes back into use by encouraging and supporting homeowners to bring these properties back into use.
- In line with the Environmental Health Enforcement Policy and Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy, we will consider enforcement measures where empty homes are causing a nuisance to the public by being unsafe or verminous, where owners are either not engaging with the council or cannot be traced, and where there is little prospect of empty homes being brought back into use voluntarily.
- We will work with social landlord partners to effectively manage the stock of available affordable rented homes in the district to address housing needs by tackling overcrowding and under-occupation and ensuring that adapted properties are suitably allocated.
- We will investigate ways to further incentivise downsizing in the rented sector.
- We will decommission sheltered housing that is no longer fit for purpose and redesignate as general needs accommodation or redevelop where appropriate.

Strategic Context

Strategy Map

The EDDC Housing Strategy has an influence on, and is influenced by, a number of other strategies both within and outside of the Housing Service. The diagram below sets out where our strategy fits in the broader strategic framework of the council.

[INSERT STRATEGY MAP]

Council Plan 2024-2028

The Council Plan [\[link\]](#) provides the framework and direction for the council's work in providing services to our residents and businesses.

It has four key priority areas:

1. A supported and engaged community that has the right homes in the right places, with appropriate infrastructure.
2. A sustainable environment that is moving towards carbon neutrality and which promotes ecological recovery.
3. A vibrant and resilient economy that supports local business, provides local jobs and leads to a reduction in poverty and inequality.
4. A well-managed, financially secure and continuously improving council that delivers quality services

East Devon Local Plan 2020 – 2042

The Local Plan [\[link\]](#) is created to guide and inform decisions on where development will take place in East Devon and is the key local document that is used in determining planning applications. This plan is currently in the final stages of production.

East Devon Climate Change Strategy 2020 – 2025

The Climate Change Strategy [\[link\]](#) sets out an ambitious programme of action to not only reduce our carbon emissions year on year, but also to mitigate against the threats that climate change place on our community. This strategy is due to be updated this year.

Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 – 2028

Our Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy [\[link\]](#) is a statutory document that sets out how we will seek help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in East Devon. Although this strategy is separate from our Housing Strategy, their goals and aspirations are clearly interlinked.

Public Health Strategy 2024 – 2027

Our Public Health Strategy details our priorities for helping to improve health and wellbeing in East Devon. One of the key public health priorities set out in the strategy relates to homelessness, housing and indoor environment factors.

EDDC Tenancy Strategy

This strategy sets out East Devon's approach to tenancy issues and reflects the housing needs and priorities for the district. It lays down the parameters that Registered Providers of social housing working in the district should have regard to. This strategy will be reviewed following the adoption of this Housing Strategy to ensure that it continues to reflect the priorities of the council and our social housing tenants.

National Context

Many of our actions as a local authority are guided by or enforced through national policies and legislation, including those highlighted below:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF [\[link\]](#) establishes the overarching principles and priorities for planning in England. It emphasizes sustainable development, economic growth, protection of the environment and social inclusion. It outlines specific policies on various aspects of planning including Housing. This was revised in 2024 following the election of the Labour government.

Housing Act 1996

The Housing Act 1996 is an important piece of legislation that primarily deals with housing and homelessness. It introduced significant changes to housing law and policy, addressing various aspects of housing provision, homelessness prevention, and social housing.

Many of the provisions in the Act have been strengthened through further legislation. For example, the Act sets out the duties and responsibilities of local authorities towards homeless individuals and families, including the provision of advisory services and temporary accommodation. This has since been strengthened, first through the 2002 Homelessness Act and then through the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act extended the duties for all local authorities to help all those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness set out in the 2002 Homelessness Act. Previously these duties only extended to those assessed as being in priority need for accommodation and to those who had not become homeless “intentionally”. These stipulations have now been removed, and the length of time that Councils are required to provide prevention and relief assistance was doubled to 56 days.

Social Housing Regulation Act 2023

The Social Housing Regulation Act [\[link\]](#) was introduced in response to the Grenfell disaster in 2017 and seeks to rebalance the relationship between social landlords and their residents through greater transparency and regulation. It links to other legislation including the Building Safety Act 2022 and the Fire Safety Act. The Regulator of Social Housing has been given greater powers to inspect and tackle landlords who fail to meet their responsibilities to tenants.

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 is aimed at addressing and preventing domestic abuse more effectively. It was introduced to address gaps in prior legislation and

to provide clearer definitions, improve victim protection, and establish stronger legal measures to handle offenders. The act defines domestic abuse broadly, including physical, emotional, economic, and coercive control, and explicitly acknowledges children as victims if they experience abuse in their household.

Future Homes and Buildings Standard

The government have committed to introduce a Future Homes Standard by 2025. This standard will seek to ensure that new build homes are future-proofed with low carbon heating and world-leading levels of energy efficiency. Changes are still being consulted on, but it will complement existing building regulations to ensure that new buildings produce over 75% less carbon than those built to current standards. There is also the possibility that any renovations or extensions to existing homes will also need to meet the new standards for making homes warmer.

Decent Homes Standard

The Decent Homes Standard [\[link\]](#) sets minimum standards for the condition of social homes. It is currently under review, considering raising the minimum standards for energy efficiency and strengthening the requirements in relation to Damp and Mould amongst other areas. The government are considering to what extent the standards should be applied to the private sector.

Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023

The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 came into force on 29 August 2023. The Act sets out to introduce changes to how supported exempt accommodation is regulated, new standards for supported exempt accommodation, and make changes to how this type of accommodation is regulated.

As a local housing authority, we are required by the Act to review supported exempt accommodation in our district, assessing what accommodation is available and what the expected future need for such accommodation might be. We must then use this information to publish a Supported Housing Strategy every five years.

The Renters' Reform Bill

Currently awaiting final approval, this bill proposes changes to the private rented sector and centres around ending fixed term tenancies, increasing notice periods for rent increases, the introduction of a new ombudsman to cover private landlords and the removal of Section 21 'no fault' evictions.

DRAFT

| Action | Measure of success | Update | Lead Officer | Deadline |
|---|---|------------|---|----------|
| We will ensure all staff are trained in Trauma Informed Practice | No. staff received training | Annually | HR Partner | |
| We will provide individual assessment of need to all people referred to housing support services | | | | |
| We will engage with all customers on changes to policy and procedure | | | | |
| We will support our Tenant involvement Group to improve their reach and ensure their voice is heard at Housing Review Board and wider council levels | | | | |
| We will complete Tenant Satisfaction Measure Surveys on a quarterly basis to enable more agile timely responses to live issues | | | | |
| We will consult with tenants and housing associations on a revised Tenancy Strategy which places an emphasis on support for tenants to improve their health and wellbeing | | | | |
| We will review and update our website to make it easier for residents to access information about housing services | | | | |
| We will undertake investigations, visits and enforcement regarding housing conditions, particularly targeting damp and mould, and excess cold or heat in the private rented sector. | No. cases raised and completed, proportion of enforcement/successful outcome? | Quarterly? | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | ongoing |
| Will provide advice and support to homeowners and private tenants in respect of actions they can take to decrease the risk of damp and mould in their homes. | Updated Webpage and leaflet advice | annual | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | TBC |
| Will provide advice and support to homeowners and private tenants in respect of actions they can take to decrease the risk of damp and mould in their homes. | No. people advised | annual | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | ongoing |
| We will work with landlords to encourage them to undertake remedial works to rental properties where required to ensure that they meet or exceed minimum standards. | proportion of cases where work undertaken without enforcement required? | annual | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | ongoing |

| | | | | |
|---|---|------------|---|---------|
| We will seek to establish links with GPs in relation to damp and mould and other poor housing conditions, to encourage them or their patients to contact us for support in tackling any housing issues. | Referral System in place | Quarterly? | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | TBC |
| We will seek to establish links with GPs in relation to damp and mould and other poor housing conditions, to encourage them or their patients to contact us for support in tackling any housing issues. | Increased number of referrals | Quarterly? | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | TBC |
| We will invest in our own housing stock to ensure that all our properties meet or exceed the Decent Homes Standard. | Proportion of properties meeting decent homes standard | Annual | Assistant Director - Regulated Housing Services | ongoing |
| We will continue to prioritise repairs and maintenance work in council properties to resolve and prevent damp and mould in our properties | | | | |
| We will seek to deliver targeted energy efficiency upgrades to our own houses | | | | |
| We will identify and bid for grant funding to help deliver energy efficiency and retrofit improvements to our social housing | | | | |
| We will work with other social landlords to improve the energy efficiency of social housing stock in the district. | evidence of partnership working | annual | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | ongoing |
| We will help residents to access grants and loans to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, including insulation, solar panels and heat pumps. | No. of grants and loans awarded | annual | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | ongoing |
| We will work with both internal and external partners to deliver grants and cost-of-living funds to residents in most need of financial support. | No. of referrals made by Financial Resilience team/ No. of people awarded funding | annual | Assistant Director - Revenues and Benefits | ongoing |
| We will develop a strategy for regenerating our estates, with resident inclusion at its core. | Strategy produced | Quarterly? | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | TBC |
| We will work in partnership with the police and other key stakeholders to tackle anti-social behaviour on our estates. | Reduction in no. of anti-social behaviour cases | Quarterly | Assistant Director - Regulated Housing Services | ongoing |

| | | | | |
|--|--|-----------|---|---------|
| We will explore how we can maximise the use of our community centres to support all households living on our estates. | Review of community centre usage | annual | Assistant Director - Regulated Housing Services | TBC |
| We will develop a digital inclusion programme, including training and access to computers for our tenants. | Programme set up | Quarterly | Assistant Director - Regulated Housing Services | TBC |
| We will develop a digital inclusion programme, including training and access to computers for our tenants. | No. tenants attending sessions | annual | Assistant Director - Regulated Housing Services | ongoing |
| We will work with our contractors to ensure that our repairs and maintenance service delivers an improved responsive repairs service to our tenants. | Improved performance KPI | Quarterly | Assistant Director - Regulated Housing Services | ongoing |
| We will develop a longer-term asset management and planned works programme to maintain and upgrade our housing stock in line with new requirements and expectations. | Asset Management plan produced | Annual | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | TBC |
| We will continue to engage with tenants on all matters relating to the delivery of our council housing, including longer term strategic planning and the best use of our existing housing stock. | Engagement activities carried out | annual | Assistant Director - Regulated Housing Services | ongoing |
| We will work with Community Land Trusts to deliver affordable housing in rural communities for the local population through financial assistance packages to support the production of Housing Needs Assessments and exploratory surveys, as well as capital investment. | No. affordable homes delivered | annual | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | ongoing |
| We will work with developers and our planning department to secure new affordable housing delivery in line with local plan expectations. | No. affordable homes delivered (Target?) | quarterly | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | ongoing |
| We will implement our refreshed Empty Homes Strategy to bring long term empty homes back into use by encouraging and supporting homeowners to bring these properties back into use. | Empty Homes Strategy produced | annual | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | TBC |

| | | | | |
|--|---|-----------|--|---------|
| In line with the Environmental Health Enforcement Policy and Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy, we will consider enforcement measures where empty homes are causing a nuisance to the public by being unsafe or verminous, where owners are either not engaging with the council or cannot be traced, and where there is little prospect of empty homes being brought back into use voluntarily. | No. Enforcement measures implemented/Cases investigated | annual | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | ongoing |
| We will produce a Housing Investment and Delivery Plan that will define how we intend to deliver more Council housing to meet the needs of households across the district. | Plan produced | quarterly | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | TBC |
| We will support other social landlords to deliver more affordable homes across the district. | No. affordable homes delivered | annual | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | ongoing |
| We will explore opportunities to prioritise affordable housing for key workers. | Options report completed? | n/a | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | TBC |
| We will work with social landlord partners to effectively manage the stock of available affordable rented homes in the district to address housing needs by tackling overcrowding and under-occupation and ensuring that adapted properties are suitably allocated. | Tenancy Strategy review?/Devon Home choice preferences? | | Assistant Director - Regulated Housing Services/ Assistant Director - Statutory Services | TBC |
| We will investigate ways to further incentivise downsizing in the rented sector. | Tenancy Strategy review | | Assistant Director - Statutory Services | TBC |
| We will review our sheltered housing stock with a view to decommission and/or redevelop where appropriate | Implement recommendations from Decommissioning Report | annual | Assistant Director - Regulated Services | ongoing |
| We will lobby central government for more flexibilities to maximise opportunities for, and investment in, the development of affordable housing. | Evidence of representations made | annual | Director - Housing Services | ongoing |
| We will consider the development of alternative and innovative affordable housing solutions. | Research and assessment of options | n/a | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | TBC |
| We will seek to utilise commuted sums to maximise affordable housing delivery across the district. | delivered through the use of commuted sums (against target) | annual | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | ongoing |

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|--|--|------------|--|---------------|
| We will work with planning and advocates for the Gypsy and Traveller community to ensure that we meet their housing needs. | Delivery of sites for established needs | annual | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | ongoing |
| We will work with planning and advocates for the Gypsy and Traveller community to ensure that we meet their housing needs. | Commitments set out in Local Plan | n/a | Assistant Director - Planning Strategy and Development Management | ongoing |
| We will support Government initiatives to provide housing for refugees | no. properties made available for refugee resettlement | | Assistant Director - Regulated Services | ongoing |
| We will deliver our Private Sector Housing Financial Assistance policy to provide loans and grants for home improvements and adaptations to residents' homes in the private sector through the Better Care Fund. | Production of PSH Finance Assistance Policy | | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | |
| We will work with Devon County Council to develop a Supported Housing Strategy in response to the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 to establish current supply and demand for supported housing | Produce Supporting Housing Strategy | annual | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling / Assistant Director Statutory Services | Subject to go |
| We will set up a new licensing scheme for supported housing in line with guidelines set out by DHLG in response to the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 | New scheme in place | n/a | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling / Assistant Director Statutory Services | Subject to go |
| We will set out requirements for the development of Extra Care facilities and/or Residential care homes for older people, particularly in larger developments. | Criteria set out in Local Plan | n/a | Assistant Director - Planning Strategy and Development Management | ongoing |
| <i>We will carry out a review of our sheltered housing stock to identify opportunities for repurposing, regenerating and improving our offer to older residents.</i> | <i>Sheltered Housing Review complete</i> | <i>n/a</i> | <i>Assistant Director - Regulated Services</i> | <i>Nov-24</i> |
| We will implement the upgrade of our home safeguard systems, embracing the latest technology to offer increased independence for vulnerable tenants. | Upgrade of systems carried out | quarterly | Assistant Director - Statutory Services | TBC |

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|--|--|---------------|---|---------------|
| We will continue our Housing First programme to assist the most vulnerable homeless people into stable accommodation and to access support from external agencies. | No. placements made/No. successful outcomes | annual | Assistant Director - Statutory Services | ongoing |
| We will utilise our Rent Deposit and Bond Scheme to assist homeless households into accommodation. | No. households assisted into accommodation | quarterly | Assistant Director - Statutory Services | ongoing |
| Our Private Sector Liaison Officers will support homeless households into private rented accommodation and landlords requiring assistance where there are tenancy issues to prevent evictions. | No. of assisted households / proportion of successful interventions | Quarterly | Assistant Director- Statutory Services | ongoing |
| We will ensure that our housing staff receive relevant training in relation to health matters to support tenants and prospective tenants. | Staff Training matrix in place | n/a | Director - Housing Services | TBC |
| We will ensure that our housing staff receive relevant training in relation to health matters to support tenants and prospective tenants. | no. of staff trained | annual | Director - Housing Services | ongoing |
| We will strengthen links with Devon County Council Adult Social Care and Health teams to better respond to the needs of tenants and prospective tenants. | Meeting attendance / Evidence of partnership working (e.g. care leaver move-on, adaptations, autism) | annual review | Director - Housing Services | ongoing |
| We will work in partnership with external agencies to support people fleeing domestic abuse. | evidence of partnership working / No. people assisted in escaping DV | Annual | Assistant Director - Statutory Services | ongoing |
| We will seek to support households experiencing overcrowding into more suitable accommodation. | No. of overcrowded households relieved | | Director - Housing Services | ongoing |
| We will engage with landlords who allow overcrowding in their accommodation and will use enforcement where necessary. | No. successful interactions with landlords | | Principal Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing | ongoing |
| We will work with planning to encourage the Lifetime Homes Standards into new developments | TBC | TBC | Assistant Director - Housing Strategy, Projects and Enabling | TBC |
| We will look to reduce social isolation through community development events and signposting to existing activities in the wider community. | Proportion of people identified as experiencing social isolation demonstrating improved engagement | annual | Assistant Director - Regulated Services | ongoing (from |

| | | | | |
|--|--------------------|--------|---|--------|
| We will seek to offer support to residents experiencing fuel poverty. | No. people advised | annual | Assistant Director - Revenues and Benefits | annual |
| We will decommission sheltered housing that is no longer fit for purpose and redesignate as general needs accommodation or redevelop where appropriate | | | | |

Report to: **Cabinet**

Date of Meeting 8 January 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



Outcome of Corporate Peer Challenge Review

Report summary:

The Local Government Association (LGA) were commissioned by East Devon Council to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge ("CPC") following a Motion at Full Council in July 2023.

The Peer Challenge was conducted in February 2024 and an action plan and timetable address those recommendations was presented to members July 2024.

The Peer Challenge Team returned on 28 November 2024 and this report presents to Members the conclusions reached by the Peer Team when reviewing the progress that has been made.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

To recommend to Council that they note the report and positive conclusions of the LGA.

Reason for recommendation:

To support and maintain ongoing improvement at the Council.

Officer: Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance melanie.wellman@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☒ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Economy
- ☐ Finance and Assets
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

The proposal to develop and prepare an action plan will assess any equality implications arising.

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; The recommendations in the CPC will ensure that the Council has the arrangements in place to support and maintain ongoing improvement at the Council.

Links to background information N/A

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ Better homes and communities for all
 - ☐ A greener East Devon
 - ☒ A resilient economy
-

Report in full

1. The Local Government Association (LGA) were commissioned by East Devon Council to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge (“CPC”) following a Motion at Full Council in July 2023.
2. The CPC took place in early February 2024. The Peer Challenge team spent three days onsite at East Devon District Council, during which they:
 - Gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
 - Spoke to almost 150 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.
3. The review focused on five key themes:
 - 1. Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council’s priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
 - 2. Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
 - 3. Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
 - 4. Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
 - 5. Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?
4. The LGA issued their report in late February 2024. The report included nine key recommendations under the following headings:
 - **Recruitment of a Chief Executive**
 - **Consideration of Cabinet working arrangements**
 - **Invest in councillor and officer development**
 - **Streamline the actions in new Council Plan**
 - **Resist the temptation to undertake further external reviews**

- **Develop a programme of external engagement and make outwardly focused work a priority for the new Chief Executive**
 - **Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors**
 - **Review visibility with housing tenants**
 - **Provide direction for leisure and culture provision**
5. An action plan was presented to Cabinet in June 2024 and then to Council in July 2024. A copy is attached at Appendix B.
 6. On 28 November 2024 the Peer Challenge team returned to East Devon to review our progress in relation to each of these Recommendations. During that visit they received a presentation from the senior leadership team and Portfolio Holders. They also had focus groups with the opposition Leaders, managers and staff.
 7. We had really positive verbal feedback from the LGA team following the review including mention of the need for us to ensure that we have sufficient confidential rooms and member rooms.
 8. In December 2024 they submitted their review findings to the Council and a copy is attached at Appendix C to this report. The Peer team commented that:-

Of the CPC's nine recommendations, the council's RAG rated action plan reports that 89 per cent of actions are completed or progressed and 11 per cent (equivalent to one recommendation) has been paused.

The peer team were pleased to note how much progress had been made by the council since the corporate peer challenge had taken place just nine months earlier. It was clear from the RAG rated action plan and from the presentation received by the peer team on site, that EDDC has made significant progress which was a positive reflection of the hard work that has been undertaken by the council. EDDC has embraced improvement, and this is evidenced in the action plan which includes not only the key recommendations made by the peer team but also includes progress against additional comments and suggestions that were mentioned in the CPC feedback report.

The full conclusions are outlined in the report at Appendix C.

Financial implications:

No direct financial implications arise from the report; however, resource implications may follow from the development of the action plan.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report

Appendix A – Peer Challenge report – February 2024

Appendix B – Peer Challenge Action Plan

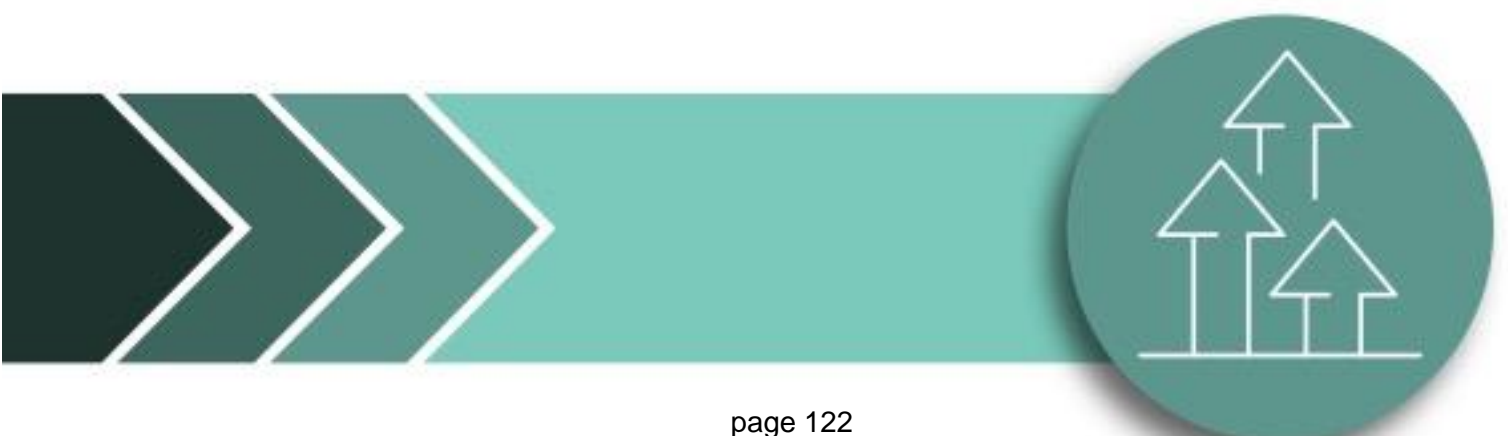
Appendix C – Peer Challenge Progress Report – December 2024

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

East Devon District Council

6 – 8 February 2024

Feedback report



Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Executive summary..... | 3 |
| 2. Key recommendations | 5 |
| 3. Summary of the peer challenge approach | 7 |
| 4. Feedback | 9 |
| 5. Next steps | 19 |

1. Executive summary

East Devon District Council (EDDC) is an ambitious council that is keen to make a positive difference to residents' lives and the environment in East Devon. Officers working at the council describe that they are working in a progressive and forward thinking environment. Officers have shown great resilience during the challenges of recent years which have been the subject of public reporting. The council's political leadership changed in 2019 after 45 years of Conservative administrations and the chief executive retired in October 2023 after 21 years in the role. This significant level of change impacted the council both politically and operationally and for some time the council suffered a lack of direction.

The council is working hard to address the challenges and has made clear progress on its journey of improvement. After a period of transition at senior officer level there is now a sense of stability, in no small part arising from how well the three interim chief executives, appointed in September 2023, have worked together. However, capacity at that senior level is limited at the moment and a permanent chief executive is needed to provide vision and direction to the staff and to support the leader and members with a strategic perspective.

The council's Cabinet work collaboratively and strive to improve themselves and the council. They may benefit from reviewing their working arrangements, for example by establishing regular workshop style sessions with senior management to inform early strategy and policy development; the senior management team will benefit from this too. Other suggestions include having informal Cabinet meetings to review draft reports and ensure all the necessary information is available to inform decisions that will be made in public; enhancing the forward plan of future decisions; empowering portfolio holders to present reports at Cabinet and ensuring that they are held to account at scrutiny. Measures and actions such as these will enable the Cabinet to work even more effectively as a cohesive team and with senior management.

The council has recently undertaken a great deal of work around improving governance and this needs to be both continued but also seen through, so the benefits are fully realised. Importantly, the peer team observed that councillor/officer relationships were positive, which was not always the case.

The council should invest in further councillor and officer development, for example, a review of the councillor induction programme that addresses learning and development needs throughout the term of the council, and political awareness training for officers would ensure newly elected councillors and officers understand their different roles and responsibilities.

A refresh of scrutiny training would help to ensure that discussions at those meetings are focused and both Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Housing Review Board are adding value.

EDDC shows some strong performance in certain key areas which are referenced later in this report. Therefore, now is a great opportunity for the councillors and management team to move above and beyond the internal matters that have occupied the council's time and enhance its reputation further. The council is now at a point where it needs to raise its profile externally at a county and regional level and be part of wider debates around devolution and regional place shaping. The leader is currently the chair of the Devon Districts Forum, and this provides a platform to build on, particularly with the recent announcement of the Devon and Torbay Devolution Deal.

It will be important for the new chief executive, once in post, to develop a programme of external engagement to build on partnership working which will help to enhance the council's external reputation.

EDDC is currently consulting on a new council plan. The peer team has seen a draft of the council plan and would recommend that the number of actions supporting the themes is streamlined to ensure that delivery of the priorities are achievable within the resources available.

Developing the council's narrative once that new council plan is approved will broadcast the aims and priorities of the council across the district, county and sub region. Considering the use of councillor and officer ambassadors as part of telling the story will help to address any legacy reputation issues.

The council has 4,300 tenanted properties. There are challenges with the Housing Service and whilst a great deal of work has been undertaken to address the issues arising from staff capacity, stock condition, complaints and repair requests, more needs to be done to improve tenant engagement, contract management and performance in dealing with repairs.

Building on the work that is already ongoing by further engaging with tenants to clearly establish what they would find valuable, should help improve the service that is received and relationship between tenants and the council.

Whilst the council has a robust approach to financial planning and an excellent track record of financial management, there are some areas that could present a financial risk. The financial viability of the Housing Revenue Account and ability to address the stock condition issues of properties is a risk.

A further risk is the provision of leisure and culture. The council should identify specific principles for the provision of these services that include timescale and budget parameters so that decisions can be made to ensure future service delivery is financially sustainable.

EDDC has undertaken a comprehensive programme of external reviews prior to this corporate peer challenge taking place. This demonstrates a clear desire for continuous improvement and the council has clearly taken on board the various feedback that has resulted in a number of recommendations for EDDC to take account of. The peer team recommendation is that an action plan is produced and included as part of the next Annual Governance Statement that consolidates the actions arising and has councillor oversight for monitoring of delivery.

2. Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

2.1 Recruitment of a Chief Executive

Progress the plans to recruit a Chief Executive and ensure sufficient capacity at director level to support the leader and councillors with strategic vision and provide vision and direction to staff.

2.2 Consideration of Cabinet working arrangements

Consider and explore options to enhance Cabinet working arrangements, for example: making space for strategic workshop sessions with senior management, so that the Cabinet can work even more effectively.

2.3 Invest in councillor and officer development

Invest in an ongoing programme of councillor development and training and political awareness training for staff to ensure wider understanding of the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers respectively.

2.4 Streamline the actions in your new Council Plan

As the council's new Council Plan is developing, further prioritise the number of actions that sit under the four themes in the new Council Plan to and delegate to and empower staff within the organisation to deliver those actions across the life of the plan.

2.5 Resist the temptation to undertake further external reviews

Consolidate the learning and recommendations from the reviews the council has undertaken and focus on addressing the actions arising from the various reports. Continue to build on governance improvements systematically reviewing all elements of the council's governance and implementing improvements where necessary.

2.6 Develop a programme of external engagement and make outwardly focused work a priority for the new Chief Executive

Develop external engagement with partners and stakeholders for example, undertake work with town and parish councils to include planning matters and host a regular Developer and Agents Forum that includes officers and the portfolio lead for planning. The new Chief Executive should prioritise work on an external focus and profile for the council; external partners are waiting to work with you at a district, county and regional level.

2.7 Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors

Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors to address reputation management and assist with ‘myth busting’. Sense check where the council is now and where it wants to be.

2.8 Review visibility with housing tenants

Whilst ensuring greater visibility with housing tenants is underway, ensure that engagement with them is effective and meaningful to sense check what they would find valuable to support the relationship between housing tenants and the council, and simultaneously address performance.

2.9 Provide direction for leisure and culture provision

Identify specific principles for leisure and culture provision that include timescale and budget parameters to ensure a financially sustainable model of service delivery.

3. Summary of the peer challenge approach

3.1 The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Councillor Mike Every – Liberal Democrat Member Peer, Deputy Leader Cotswold District Council
- Councillor Colin Noble – Conservative Member Peer, Suffolk County Council
- Kath Marriott – Lead Peer, Chief Executive Rushcliffe Borough Council
- Stephen Capes – Director of Regeneration and Policy, Derbyshire Dales District Council
- Heather Wills – Principal Advisor (Finance and Governance), Local Government Association
- Kathryn Trant – Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

3.2 Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

3.3 The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent three days onsite at East Devon District Council, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to almost 150 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.

4. Feedback

4.1 Local priorities and outcomes

EDDC adopted a council plan in 2021 with a vision for the following three years to make a positive difference to residents' lives and the environment in East Devon.

A new council plan is now in development following consultation with councillors, officers, stakeholders and residents. The priorities are clear and work well. They continue the three themes from the previous plan, in short, 'Better Homes and Communities for all', 'A Greener East Devon' and 'A Resilient Economy bringing Prosperity to the district'. There is an additional theme included in the new council plan around the 'Delivery of Quality Services'. Traditionally EDDC has been one of the better performing and more outwardly-looking councils in Devon and the addition of this theme confirms the council's ambition to overcome the more recent challenges and return to being a top performing council.

A draft of the plan was shared with the peer team. It currently includes 52 actions and 100 measures. This number will be difficult to manage effectively, and the peer team recommend that the actions and measures should be streamlined based on deliverability and priority, or at least profiled over the four years of the plan.

EDDC has a strong economic development strategy and a team of officers delivering that strategy who are highly respected. A quote from one stakeholder was *"I feel very listened to – the business support offer is right up there compared to other local authorities I've worked with. No hesitation"*. The council has good levels of engagement with local businesses and has supported excellent regional level growth sites within the Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone (EEDEZ). The council has worked in collaboration with partners to enable growth ambitions and to drive clean growth and create jobs and a skilled workforce for the future. A brand strategy for EEDEZ has been developed and agreed that sets the purpose of the EEDEZ "To provide a world class, low carbon environment for business successes". This makes clear the ambition for the zone and has attracted businesses with a similar ethos.

EDDC is establishing a corporate green team which will include senior representatives from each of the council's services. This is a good approach to embedding climate change work across the council and ensuring that climate change priorities are included as specific areas of development in all service plans.

The peer team saw practical examples of the council tackling climate change in the district, for example the drive for clean growth at EEDEZ, the visit to the depot to see the treatment of recycling material, and the district generally appeared extremely clean and tidy which is a credit to frontline operatives.

EDDC has excellent recycling rates and low levels of residual waste as evidenced by the [LG Inform](#) report. The LG Inform data and performance information system is hosted by the Local Government Association on behalf of the sector and, using the most recently available data, shows that EDDC, when compared to other councils in its Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) 'family' grouping of other similar authorities, has the lowest levels of residual waste at 255.7kg per household against a mean of 428.8kg and best recycling rates at 59.5% of waste collected against a mean of 43.07%. These figures represent one of the core strengths of EDDC that has been embedded over a number of years.

Cranbrook is a new community being developed in East Devon. 3,200 homes have so far been delivered and there are further phases of the development to be constructed. EDDC has reviewed its approach to the delivery of Cranbrook and taken the lessons learnt, for example infrastructure needing to be in place and more community engagement and will apply them into the planning and delivery of a second new community in the district.

Despite a great deal of work taking place over the last few months, there are challenges within the Housing service in terms of staffing levels and capacity, repairs performance, the complaints procedure and poor stock condition of the properties. EDDC has 4,300 tenanted properties. A stock condition survey of all properties is almost complete and whilst the survey is part of a project to support making the properties more energy efficient, it will also identify stock condition issues and in time should reduce repeated repair requests. Feedback from some tenants suggests that a higher profile from members and officers would be welcome. The peer team recognise that significant engagement work has been undertaken but would recommend

engaging with residents who are keen to help to sense check what support they would welcome in strengthening the relationship between tenants and the council. Ensuring effective engagement, listening and responding to tenants as well as involving them in solutions. The sentiment expressed was that *“they are the council’s houses, but our homes”*.

Once the stock condition survey is complete, a realistic and costed programme of housing improvements will be required and will need to be built into the Housing Revenue Account once the information is available.

Council Plan priorities and actions feed into service plan objectives and then flow into team and individual objectives known as the Performance Excellence Reviews (PER). This ensures a ‘golden thread’ from council priorities through service plans to individual staff through their objectives.

Performance management is currently managed within teams and reviewed quarterly by the Corporate Performance and Project Management Team and reported to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Scrutiny Committee. The council may wish to consider an overarching corporate approach at senior level to performance management with a clear formalised process so that SLT and Cabinet can quickly see and manage corporate performance and therefore respond to emerging issues that may be impacting service delivery, for example monthly performance clinics with a dashboard of indicators. Corporate oversight on a regular basis of delivery of significant programmes and projects (defined in terms of risk as well as scale) should be included to enable corporate management of projects and identification of risks that could impact on delivery.

The council’s approach to equality, diversity and inclusion is a work in progress and whilst it is too early to judge its effectiveness, the impact of work so far is positive. Examples of work include the equality impact assessment template has been updated, the policy will be reviewed in 2024 with councillor and officer training planned, and work is taking place to identify and build relationships with groups to support and inform community engagement work. A corporate lead for the work has been identified.

4.2 Organisational and place leadership

The Anti-Poverty work is a great example of EDDC leading a partnership – the council is rightly proud of this work and should consider showcasing it more widely on the national stage. It involves the council working in collaboration with partners to support residents in helping to address root causes of poverty. Through collaborative working the council can help residents access all the services available to them whilst also supporting them to learn how they can access the support themselves. This has only become possible through building strong working relationships with partners across the business and voluntary sector.

EDDC also works in partnership with service providers such as SUEZ who provide recycling and waste services, LED Community Leisure Ltd who provide leisure centre services and Strata Service Solutions who provide ICT to EDDC and two neighbouring councils.

Partners are impressed by the openness and willingness to collaborate that was demonstrated by EDDC. This is a clear example of partnership working that could put EDDC back on the regional stage. The council's partners would like to see EDDC step forward and show regional leadership on priorities that are important to it.

One of the stakeholders commented *“Stuffed full of environmental gems is East Devon like a string of pearls – the only thing holding us back is working together”*.

There have been some challenges with partnership working too, for example with Devon County Council (DCC) and Exmouth on the masterplan work. It appeared the previous masterplan was not sufficiently consulted on to secure full public and partner support and funding. However, the council has undertaken significant regeneration work linked to its land holdings along the Exmouth seafront. It will be a positive step to see this work continue with an overarching vision in place.

EDDC should continue to develop the relationships with town and parish councils, of which there are 69 in total. The council recognises this need and already has plans in place to address this such as holding workshops in the summer of 2024, particularly around planning and s106 spend. There is a clear opportunity to strengthen the relationships through proactive and consistent engagement mechanisms and by consulting on sensitive issues such as the Local Plan as a matter of course.

The Leader of EDDC should have the confidence to undertake his role given the trust placed in him by his fellow cabinet colleagues. He is perceived by neighbouring councils as becoming more 'statesmanlike', both as Leader of council and as the current chair of the Devon Districts Forum. Once the new chief executive is in place, they will need to represent the district strategically alongside the Leader to raise the profile and reputation of the council. This will address the more recent perception that EDDC has become more inward facing and will help to rebuild the external reputation of the council and further develop a network of partners.

The new senior management team at EDDC includes a number of Assistant Directors. This team works well together and shows great commitment to the council and the district. The talent at this level could be harnessed to lead on corporate project work and managing cross cutting themes of work, for example on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, on Performance Management, on the Green Team, on adopting a customer centric approach. This would ensure corporate oversight and perhaps offer the opportunity for other officers to become involved in work themes of particular interest to them.

There have been media reports about bullying at EDDC but the peer team did not find this to be the culture and staff said positively that they didn't recognise this portrayal of EDDC. Internally the council is seen as 'progressive' and 'forward thinking'. There is a sense from officers and councillors of a desire to move forwards and stop focusing on the recent challenges, the council has turned a corner and a positive direction of travel is now set. EDDC should consider developing staff ambassadors to counteract some of the negative press about EDDC as a workplace. An example could be to build on the recruitment video that is already on the EDDC website where officers speak so positively about the benefits of working for the council.

EDDC has a good external communications strategy. The council uses extensive external communication methods including e-newsletters, residents' newsletters which are delivered three times a year, an App and engagement through social media which is monitored and responded to allowing for real time communication. The council recently consulted on the new council plan and is aiming to provide an evaluation of the responses received, if and how the council plan is altered in line with feedback. This will demonstrate the council's intention to engage rather than communicate so that residents can be confident that the council is listening and proactively seeking views.

In terms of internal communications, staff are well informed and comfortable that they have the opportunity to have their voices heard at staff awareness sessions and briefings. A councillors' newsletter has recently been developed and joins the impressive range of internal communications that the council has adopted.

4.3 Governance and culture

The council has invited a number of reviews to take place which clearly demonstrates a desire for continuous improvement following a period of transition. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), Investors in People (IiP) and Grant Thornton in their Value for Money Auditors Report have all recently provided recommendations to EDDC prior to the LGA corporate peer challenge taking place.

There is now an opportunity for senior officers and councillors to take key outstanding points from the reviews listed above and include them in the annual review of the council's controls and governance. This review ensures wider understanding of areas where ongoing improvement is required and so that the council's Annual Governance Statement fully reflects both areas for improvement and actions the council will take to address them. The peer team recommends that the Audit and Governance committee monitors delivery of the Annual Governance Statement action plan in addition to reviewing the draft statement prior to its approval.

EDDC has already undertaken, and has a number of actions underway, to improve governance arrangements at the council, including:

- A refreshed Senior Leadership Team allowing a full cascade of information to all staff and full engagement of all senior officers in decision making.
- A weekly meeting between the interim chief executives and the Leader and Deputy Leader providing a two way communication channel which is constructive and supportive.
- Action to revise the template for decision-making reports to support officers to ensure that councillors receive all appropriate information and advice.
- The setting up of a 'Constitution Member Working Group' to work on the wholesale review of the constitution.

- The updating and approval of a new risk policy and consideration of the council's risk appetite.

The council should continue to build on its work to update its risk management approach and ensure that Cabinet are sighted on the council's strategic risks. Further areas for consideration include ensuring that service and strategic risks are reviewed in a timely way to respond to changing circumstances.

Councillor/officer relationships are largely positive and productive. A councillor/officer protocol is in place and will be reviewed after the corporate peer challenge has taken place. It will be important that this protocol is a constant reference once the new chief executive is in place to ensure the head of paid service role is clearly and widely understood, as well as roles of senior councillors.

The peer team recommend investment in an ongoing programme of councillor development and officer training to ensure understanding of the different roles and responsibilities in addition to ensuring that councillors are equipped to perform all of their roles and are kept updated on new developments. Officers may benefit from political awareness training to ensure wider understanding of the different roles for councillors and officers. Councillors will benefit from a refresh of scrutiny training to ensure discussions at their respective committees are focused and adding value, coordinated with implementation of actions arising from the Scrutiny Improvement Review. The council should continue to use the resources available such as the South West Audit Committee Chairs Forum and the LGA Leadership offer.

Outcomes from motions to council are not reported back to councillors. Similarly, recommendations from the scrutiny committees are not tracked to show their impact. The council should develop a tracking reporting mechanism so that the loop is closed on outstanding actions and motions. This will allow councillors to see the impact of actions recommended and motions debated and passed. A summary of this could be included in an annual report to full council.

The Cabinet works collaboratively. However, the peer team recommend that the Cabinet consider their working arrangements as there are opportunities available to them that could make them work even more effectively together. Examples include informal workshops with ELT to sense check areas of work, empower portfolio holders to present their reports to Cabinet and developing a clear forward plan. All of these

options will support the Cabinet in working together in a cohesive way to lead EDDC. EDDC is not unusual in reporting challenges with timetabling of formal council meetings, and a number of councillors reported issues with the timing of meetings. It will be important to understand if there is a related impact on meeting attendance. This is a topic that could perhaps be explored by a councillor working group, if the council felt it would be helpful to do so.

4.4 Financial planning and management

EDDC has an excellent financial track record and has successfully managed the General Fund budget in recent years without recourse to use of reserves. The council has developed a Financial Sustainability Model (FSM) which is a process that undertakes reviews to ensure value for money, drives efficiencies to see what savings can be achieved and forms an evidence base that the council has done what it can. The FSM and savings plans to balance future budgets should be part of the budget and budget monitoring reports to decision making bodies and to scrutiny, to provide clarity and detail to aid early decision making and should include 'big ticket' items as well as service efficiencies.

The council has a robust approach to financial planning. Its Medium Term Financial Plan covers a period of 10 years, updated each autumn, and it provides a sound basis for setting the following year's budget. The council ensures that the council plan objectives are aligned to the budget so that resources are linked.

The MTFP includes a significant challenge in 2026/27 if there is a rebasing of business rates as the council has benefitted greatly from retained business rates. The challenge for the council will be the extent to which the FSM by itself will be sufficient to bridge any budget gap that arises as a result of rebasing of business rates. The revenue budget should be modelled for 2026/27 onwards, using a variety of scenarios regarding the potential impact of business rates revaluation and other risks, and this modelling will help to inform decisions as planning activity during the next year will be key.

The council's overall financial monitoring is reported quarterly to Cabinet, but performance monitoring is not being reported to Cabinet. EDDC should ensure that both budget monitoring and performance monitoring is done regularly at the right level.

The council may wish to review how the budget is scrutinised as it was reflected to the peer team that service plans were more of a focus than the budget itself as part of the preparation for budget setting for 2024/25. Cross party budget workshops are a mechanism used by many councils to ensure the focus of budget discussions remains high level and strategic.

The council could benefit from taking the opportunity to review the work programme and effectiveness of the Audit and Governance Committee, informed by CIPFA guidance, indeed it is recommended good practice to do so. By reviewing its work programme against its terms of reference (and by ensuring that its terms of reference match CIPFA guidance as part of the constitution review) it can ensure its annual work programme covers the right bases.

Notwithstanding the robust approach to financial planning, there are a number of areas that represent a financial risk to the council. These include:

- The waste and recycling contract – a large overspend is forecast
- Housing stock – the financial impact of the stock condition survey
- Leisure

In respect of leisure, the council needs a clear strategy that sets out a plan of delivery with key principles. Questions for the council to ask include: What leisure and culture provision does EDDC need/can afford? What is the timescale for decision making to ensure a financially sustainable solution?

The council should consider better developing and defining its portfolio of leisure and culture as not every site needs all services. Conduct benchmarking and visit other authorities to inform the exploration for sustainable delivery models. These will need to balance opportunities (such as health and decarbonisation agendas) with threats (such as the costs of maintaining ageing leisure facilities).

The risks arising from the financial impact of the stock condition survey will be known once the survey is complete and can then be built into the ongoing budget. Until then, the council is exposed so needs to expedite this work. Building into the existing budget may not be easy and looking outwards for examples of good practice may help to address the challenge.

The waste and recycling contract risks relate to the large overspend forecast for 2023/24 and the significant additional funding in the draft budget for 2024/25. It is unclear whether the additional funding will be sufficient given the level of overspend and this will need to be closely monitored.

4.5 Capacity for improvement

The three interim chief executives were appointed in September 2023 after the retirement of the previous chief executive. Under their guidance and direction there is a sense of stability across the council, and they should be applauded for the way they have worked together. They have used staff awareness sessions to make sure the workforce feel engaged and valued.

However, a permanent chief executive is needed and the plans for recruitment into this role should be progressed to ensure sufficient capacity at director level to support the leader and Cabinet to provide strategic vision and direction and provide direction to staff and oversight of delivery. Officers are looking forward to feeling more settled once the new chief executive is in post and there is a sense of anticipation that the new chief executive will provide more direction to staff.

Currently, the split of services is across the three interim chief executives. Whilst it will be a decision for the new chief executive once in post, it will be helpful to get staff and resources into the right place and take the opportunity to ensure an appropriate distribution of services and responsibilities across the roles.

Some services had workforce capacity issues that were impacting on service delivery, for example the peer team heard of capacity issues in finance, housing and planning. The workforce problems in finance and housing are being addressed, but capacity in planning is a national issue and harder to solve. The measures set out below as part of the wider measures to address recruitment challenges will help.

The council is working closely with Strata, its ICT partner on Transformation, ensuring there is a customer focus as the programme progresses. There is a clear direction of travel for the digital by default project. Resources are not limitless, but the Council now has a prioritisation process so that urgent ICT and transformation projects are progressed first.

The council has introduced a workforce plan, and this is currently being revised. The plan will be used to inform the council's future people strategy and priorities and will be an effective tool in allowing managers to identify workforce needs and gaps and how to address them.

EDDC has employed a number of effective measures to address recruitment challenges. During 2021 and 2022 the council undertook a Reward Review to address recruitment challenges. Alongside a wider pay review the council has implemented the Real Living Wage as part of the proposals which aligns to the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Further actions to address recruitment challenges include the 'Grow our Own' plans and to support this the council has become a member of the South West Apprenticeship Ambassador network which promotes apprenticeships to other employers. EDDC currently has 17 apprenticeships which is impressive.

The council introduced a Personnel Committee to oversee workforce matters and monitor vacancies to give councillors oversight of capacity and resource issues. The peer team would question whether this committee will be necessary once the new chief executive is in post as workforce matters will be their responsibility.

EDDC has an impressive range of internal engagement. Officers report good levels of engagement and communication including welcome meetings, staff awareness sessions, an apprentice lunch and star awards. There is a wellbeing offer that is positive and welcomed by staff, 'Happy, Healthy, Here', which offers a wide range of support and initiatives to staff.

5. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a progress review within twelve months of the CPC, which provides space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the recommendations from this report.

In the meantime, Paul Clarke, Principal Adviser for South West, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Paul is available to discuss any further support the council requires. paul.clarke@local.gov.uk.

| Directorate | ID | Recommendations | Actions | Timeframe | Director / Lead officer | Current status | Current status update |
|-------------|-------|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| CEO | PC-1 | Recruitment of a Chief Executive Progress the plans to recruit a Chief Executive and ensure sufficient capacity at director level to support the leader and councillors with strategic vision and provide vision and direction to staff. | Recruit a new Chief Executive | Jun-24 | CEO | Complete | New CEO recruited and starting in post 1st June 2024 |
| | | | Revise director structure to ensure capacity and look at the broader structures within the senior leadership team. | Jun-24 | CEO | Complete | New director structure agreed by full council. New directors agreed by full council are now in post. Work has started on a broader review of directorate structures. |
| CEO | PC-1a | A councillor/officer protocol is in place and will be reviewed after the corporate peer challenge has taken place. It will be important that this protocol is a constant reference once the new chief executive is in place to ensure the head of paid service role is clearly and widely understood, as well as roles of senior councillors. | Review of councillor/officer protocol | 24-Oct | Director of Governance | In progress | Draft Protocol prepared and considered by Member Constitution Working Group. Standards Committee have also considered it and asked for a further report on 18 July 2024. This report has been completed and reported back to the Standards Committee in October 2024. Comments are being fed back to the Constitution Working Group on the 11th November 2024 and the final document to be presented to a future Full Council meeting. |
| CEO | PC-1b | The new senior management team at EDDC includes a number of Assistant Directors. This team works well together and shows great commitment to the council and the district. The talent at this level could be harnessed to lead on corporate project work and managing cross cutting themes of work, for example on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, on Performance Management, on the Green Team, on adopting a customer centric approach. This would ensure corporate oversight and perhaps offer the opportunity for other officers to become involved in work themes of particular interest to them. | Senior Leadership Team review of structure and responsibilities and undertake any recruitment required following this review. | Dec-24 | CEO | In progress | Director recruitment is completed. Wider structure considerations under review, initial analysis of current skill gaps and areas of risk have been identified further work required to address these areas within the finacial envelope. |
| | | | Agree development plan for SLT as a team and individually | Feb-25 | CEO | in progress | SLT (as is) have already undertaken some development, including piloting the Emergenetics psychometric tool in liaison with the LGA, which helped team members to understand their thinking and behaviour styles as individuals and a team. This will be built on further once the revised permanent SLT arrangements are confirmed. |
| | | | Identify opportunities for cross-cutting working which aligns with SLT structure, responsibilities and development plan | Mar-25 | CEO | Initial action complete ongoing review | Oversight and lead for corporate themes and project to be determined and monitored through project management board moving forward. We have already started some of this work in areas such as leisure, culture and housing. Further defining the relationship between ELT and SLT can work together such as on the customer charter project. |
| Governance | PC-2 | Consideration of Cabinet working arrangements Consider and explore options to enhance Cabinet working arrangements, for example: making space for strategic workshop sessions with senior management, so that the Cabinet can work even more effectively. | Workshops already being developed, leisure underway, culture set up, housing working through different workshops | Sep-24 | Director of Governance | Complete | Weekly meetings between ELT and the Leader/Deputy Leader/PFH have already been put in place and monthly Cabinet briefings have been set up. In addition workshops to cover specific topics are already underway including leisure, culture and housing. |
| Governance | PC-2a | The peer team recommend that the Cabinet consider their working arrangements as there are opportunities available to them that could make them work even more effectively together. Examples include informal workshops with ELT to sense check areas of work, empower portfolio holders to present their reports to Cabinet and developing a clear forward plan. | Director of Governance to take a paper to Cabinet briefing. Cabinet to take ownership of this work and undertake to have a workshop before the autumn to explore this. | Sep-24 | Director of Governance | Complete | Developed the forward plan and monthly informal workshops with ELT taking place. Some Portfolio Holders already presenting reports and further work to be done on this at the November cabinet briefing. |
| Finance | PC-2b | The peer team recommends that the Audit and Governance committee monitors delivery of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) action plan in addition to reviewing the draft statement prior to its approval. | A&G approve the AGS currently, monitoring of actions will be introduced going forward | Sep-24 | Director of Finance | Complete | Draft 2023/24 statement is in preparation, once adopted actions will be monitored through reports to A&G committee. AGS will being going to the November A&G committee meeting. |
| Finance | PC-2c | The council could benefit from taking the opportunity to review the work programme and effectiveness of the Audit and Governance Committee, informed by CIPFA guidance, indeed it is recommended good practice to do so. By reviewing its work programme against its terms of reference (and by ensuring that its terms of reference match CIPFA guidance as part of the constitution review) it can ensure its annual work programme covers the right bases. | A number of good practice improvements have recently been introduced : Independent reps to be advertised in June/July 24, training programme to be presented to July 24 committee based on skills questionnaire matrix. Other best practice against the guidance will reviewed to determine other actions required, to be reported to Sept A&G. | 1st stage Jul 24 (training schedule & reps), 2nd stage Sept 24 (identification of other best practice requirements) | Director of Finance | In progress | November A&G committee will receive a report on the CIPFA best practice and our current position with recommendations for improvements. This will lead to changes in the work programme moving forward. Interviews for the independent reps will be taking place on the 12 December. Training programme has been agreed and is being rolled out with the second session being held on the 21 November. In addition self assement of CIFA's best practice being presented on the 21st November with key improvement recommendations. |
| Governance | PC-2d | EDDC is not unusual in reporting challenges with timetabling of formal council meetings, and a number of councillors reported issues with the timing of meetings. It will be important to understand if there is a related impact on meeting attendance. This is a topic that could perhaps be explored by a councillor working group, if the council felt it would be helpful to do so. | To broaden out this action to include the number of panels and meetings - Scrutiny to review. Democratic Service will look at starting to draft the calendar of meetings earlier in the year. | Sep-24 | Director of Governance | In progress | The Member Development Working Group will be considering this in October 2024 and a survey as to the timings of meetings will follow. We will engage with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government over its intention to introduce hybride meetings. |
| Governance | PC-3 | Invest in councillor and officer development Invest in an ongoing programme of councillor development and training and political awareness training for staff to ensure wider understanding of the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers respectively. | Political awareness training for officers and members to be scoped and commissioned, with the aim of delivering in autumn/winter 2024. | Feb-25 | Corporate Lead for HR and Democratic Services Manager | In progress | Member development working group meeting in October to produce a programme of councillor development. We have also secured training from the Centre for Public Scrutiny for Scrutiny work planning which will be rolled out before Christmas. A&G committee have also agreed a training programme which is part way through delivery. Political Awareness Training to form part of the programme of councillor development. |

| Directorate | ID | Recommendations | Actions | Timeframe | Director / Lead officer | Current status | Current status update |
|------------------|-------|---|--|-----------|--|----------------|--|
| Finance | PC-4 | Streamline the actions in your new Council Plan As the council’s new Council Plan is developing, further prioritise the number of actions that sit under the four themes in the new Council Plan to and delegate to and empower staff within the organisation to deliver those actions across the life of the plan. | Reviewed and the actions streamlined in the council plan. Recognise that this needs to be reviewed with Cabinet regularly so that we continue to streamline and prioritise. Reporting on progress to come to cabinet regularly. | Apr-24 | Director of Finance | Complete | Council plan actions were reviewed and challenged prior to submission to full council for agreement and sign off for 2024. We will ensure that this is a live document and reviewed regularly to ensure that the actions and measures are reviewed and updated accordingly. |
| Finance | PC-5 | Resist the temptation to undertake further external reviews Consolidate the learning and recommendations from the reviews the council has undertaken and focus on addressing the actions arising from the various reports. Continue to build on governance improvements systematically reviewing all elements of the council’s governance and implementing improvements where necessary. | Actions from review are collated into one spreadsheet for review. | May-24 | Director of Finance | Complete | Action and measures sheet has been developed and versions for each Director has been shared to help them track required actions. |
| | | | Actions are monitored through the year using the final agreed performance / project software. Directors to report / brief cabinet on progress or issues. | Apr-25 | Director of Finance | In progress | Actions are being monitored and will be loaded onto our new Corporate Performance Software which has now been procured. |
| Governance | PC-5a | EDDC has undertaken a comprehensive programme of external reviews prior to this corporate peer challenge taking place. This demonstrates a clear desire for continuous improvement and the council has clearly taken on board the various feedback that has resulted in a number of recommendations for EDDC to take account of. The peer team recommendation is that an action plan is produced and included as part of the next Annual Governance Statement that consolidates the actions arising and has councillor oversight for monitoring of delivery. | Outcomes are collated for the Annual Governance statement for Cabinet and A&G oversight. | 24-Sep | Director of Governance and Director of Finance | Complete | There are many actions identified through external reviews with a large part not relevant to the AGS. Areas specifically related to Governance and of a threshold relevant to the AGS will be included and monitored through the Audit & Governance Committee. Other actions identified will be monitored through reporting to Cabinet. |
| CEO & Governance | PC-6 | Develop a programme of external engagement and make outwardly focused work a priority for the new Chief Executive Develop external engagement with partners and stakeholders for example, undertake work with town and parish councils to include planning matters and host a regular Developer and Agents Forum that includes officers and the portfolio lead for planning. The new Chief Executive should prioritise work on an external focus and profile for the council; external partners are waiting to work with you at a district, county and regional level. | Chief Executive development programme and part of corporate communications plan. Need to diarise our first Town and Parish event and ensure we have regular events/meetings moving forwards. Undertake a review of contacts for our Town and Parishes to ensure they are up to date. | 24-Oct | CEO and Corporate Lead for Communication, Digital Services and Engagement/Direct or of Place | In progress | Work started on the Engagement Strategy and key stakeholders have been identified. We have not yet held our first Town and Parish event but this will be a priority for our newly appointed Communitcations Manager. We have however been working with our external staekholders and some good examples currently are the Water Summit, Devolution and Anti Poverty project. In February we will be hosting a Voluntary Sector thank you event at Blackdown House with a wide range of VCSE organisations being invited to attend. New CEO has stared to form relationships with key partners such as Devon Chief Executives, Chair of SWW and attending first LGA conference. We have continued to holding our Agents Forums with one in June and on due to happen in November. |
| Governance | PC-7 | Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors to address reputation management and assist with ‘myth busting’. Sense check where the council is now and where it wants to be. | Link to employer brand for office ambassadors. Link to cultural work and communications and engagement plan which has been developed to support the appointment of the new CEO. Look to ensure that our use of terminology of champions/ambassadors is consistent. | Dec-24 | Corporate Leads For HR and Communication, Digital Services and Engagement | On hold | Some of this work has been on hold through the summer due to staff absence of the project lead, however work to progress our culture of openness and transparency has been moving forward and we will be holding staff awarness sessions thourgh the autumn. |
| Governance | PC-7a | The council introduced a Personnel Committee to oversee workforce matters and monitor vacancies to give councillors oversight of capacity and resource issues. The peer team would question whether this committee will be necessary once the new chief executive is in post as workforce matters will be their responsibility. | In light of all of the other steps being taken to improve our performance reporting to members and the appointment of the new Chief Executive, the Cabinet to consider whether this Committee is still necessary moving forward. | Sep-24 | Director of Governance | In progress | December Cabinet briefing to consider this recommendation. |
| Housing | PC-8 | Review visibility with housing tenants Whilst ensuring greater visibility with housing tenants is underway, ensure that engagement with them is effective and meaningful to sense check what they would find valuable to support the relationship between housing tenants and the council, and simultaneously address performance. | Regulator engagement, housing comms calendar, surveys, HRB updates and guidance. Tenant Panels set up. Plans for Getting to know you surveys, Transactional Surveys and tenant events. | Sep-24 | Director of Housing and Health | In progress | Discussion held at HRB regarding the recruitment process and requirements of tenant members, and an active recruitment campaign took place, resulting in the very recent recommendation to appt of two tenants to the HRB. Their appt will be proposed at the next HRB on Nov. 7th. We have also expanded the membership of Councillors to the HRB by two to ensure there is greater member focus and attention. “Getting to Know You Survey” – initial plans were proposed to carry out a survey across all of our tenants in the coming year, ensuring that the data we hold for them is up to date and full. The indicative costs of outsourcing this work resulted in it being on hold, however, a working group have now been created to look for lower cost solutions as the need for this work is still valid. The survey would mean that we would have better insight into the demographics of our tenant base and able to tailor our services to better meet their needs. This is a vital piece of work in many ways but will specifically develop understanding in areas such as overcrowding or under-occupancy etc. Transactional Surveys with our tenants, particularly in relation to repairs, are underway in addition to our now quarterly TSM gathering enables us to react in a more agile way to live issues. Results from the repairs surveying are positive and demonstrate that 97% customers are happy with their repairs when completed. Tenant Event – happened on 22nd August; all tenants were invited to a family friendly event with opportunity for tenants to talk with a wide variety of partner agencies, Cllrs, Officers and one another about how we can improve services. The event was well attended and the team are planning next years events with the tenant representative group. |
| Place | PC-9 | Provide direction for leisure and culture provision Identify specific principles for leisure and culture provision that include timescale and budget parameters to ensure a financially sustainable model of service delivery. | Workshops already underway. Will culminate in a report to ensure a financially sustainable delivery model is in place. | 24-Dec | Director of Place | In progress | A total of six workshops have now been held which have helped to ensure a comprehensive examination of the issues associated with future leisure service delivery. A final workshop is scheduled which will then lead to a report to Cabinet. The parameters for a review of culture provision are currently being scoped. |

| Directorate | ID | Recommendations | Actions | Timeframe | Director / Lead officer | Current status | Current status update |
|------------------------|--------|---|---|--|---|----------------|---|
| Place | PC-9a | The council should consider better developing and defining its portfolio of leisure and culture as not every site needs all services. Conduct benchmarking and visit other authorities to inform the exploration for sustainable delivery models. These will need to balance opportunities (such as health and decarbonisation agendas) with threats (such as the costs of maintaining ageing leisure facilities). | Workshops underway in terms of framing options for leisure delivery going forward. Will culminate in a report to Cabinet so that these options can be considered formally. Same approach will also be adopted in relation to cultural provision. | 24-Dec | Director of Place | In progress | Workshops are progressing as above. The culture review is also currently being scoped. |
| Governance | PC- 10 | Performance Monitoring The council may wish to consider an overarching corporate approach at senior level to performance management with a clear formalised process so that SLT and Cabinet can quickly see and manage corporate performance and therefore respond to emerging issues that may be impacting service delivery, for example monthly performance clinics with a dashboard of indicators. | Work with Strata to develop proposals for the implementation of a new performance/project/risk system to replace SPAR.net to improve reporting function of corporate objectives and PIs, linking to complaints and Cllrs/MP corporate systems and outcomes. After the election look at our communications channels and set out how we will communicate with our local MP's | Jun-24 | Director of Governance | In progress | Cabinet agreed the budget for this new software and the procurement process has been completed with a successful provider being awarded the contract to supply us with a new corporate performance and risk system including modules supporting project and policy management. The timetable for implementation for the system has been agreed and the project is now underway. New process for dealing with complaints from MP's has been put in place. |
| | | | Develop an implementation plan for agreed changes. | Jul-24 | Director of Governance | In progress | Timeline for implementation has been agreed and is being worked through with the software provider. |
| | | | New system if agreed to be implemented. | Nov-24 | Director of Governance | In progress | System agreed and the timetable for implementation for the software has been agreed and the project is now underway. |
| Governance and Finance | PC-10a | EDDC should ensure that both budget monitoring and performance monitoring is done regularly at the right level. | Review reports timetable and suggest new reporting methods for ELT, SLT, Cabinet, Scrutiny and any other committees, report back on budget manager and senior officer budget meetings timetable and approach. Refreshing and reviewing the approach to budget monitoring meetings going forward. | Nov-24 | Directors of Finance and Governance | In progress | Performance and finance report monitoring being reviewed as part of the project to implement a new performance system. Report considered at ELT for reporting and service planning changes. Next performance report going to 27 November Cabinet which will include a timetable for future reporting. A new performance framework will be developed alongside the introduction of the new system. |
| Governance and Finance | PC-10b | Corporate oversight on a regular basis of delivery of significant programmes and projects (defined in terms of risk as well as scale) should be included to enable corporate management of projects and identification of risks that could impact on delivery. | Currently monitored through BSCAP - Improvements in corporate recording and reporting to be determined this could either follow Strata's new process following Microsoft Project and using PowerBI or be part of new performance management system. | Initial assessment Dec 24 | Directors of Finance and Governance | In progress | Ongoing project and programme management is include as part of the new Corporate Performance Software implementation with a project manager module being included as part of our purchased package. |
| Governance | PC-10c | Outcomes from motions to council are not reported back to councillors. Similarly, recommendations from the scrutiny committees are not tracked to show their impact. The council should develop a tracking reporting mechanism so that the loop is closed on outstanding actions and motions. This will allow councillors to see the impact of actions recommended and motions debated and passed. A summary of this could be included in an annual report to full council. | Investigate how this can be monitored and reported on, including implementation of all motions on new corporate system. | Dec-24 | Director of Governance | In progress | Different solutions are being looked at including MOD.Gov and also being included in the requirements for a new performance system. In the meantime a spreadsheet is being used to monitor motions and other key decisions. The review into the new performance system should happen by December 2024. |
| Governance and Finance | PC-11 | Risk Management The council should continue to build on its work to update its risk management approach and ensure that Cabinet are sighted on the council's strategic risks. | Engage with external Risk Management providers Gallagher Bassett to provide audit and support training. Monitoring reports to Cabinet from Sept 24. | Sep-24 | Directors of Finance and Governance | In progress | Risk review work with Gallagher Bassett (GB) still ongoing. Risk Health Check report completed by GB and risk workshops with Directorates held on the 2and and 3rd October 2024. Corporate Risk Workshop to be facilitated by GB on the 21st November and outcome to be reported to Cabinet and A&G committees at the start of 2025. |
| Finance | PC-12 | Finance The revenue budget should be modelled for 2026/27 onwards, using a variety of scenarios regarding the potential impact of business rates revaluation and other risks, and this modelling will help to inform decisions as planning activity during the next year will be key. | Adopted Financial Plan identifies the activity for Summer of 2024. | Cabinet Workshop May 2025 | Director of Finance | Complete | All reviewed and now encompassed in the latest financial plan was considered by Cabinet on the 30 October 2024. Cabinet workshops in April / May 2025 once government funding review has taken place. |
| Finance | PC-12a | The council may wish to review how the budget is scrutinised as it was reflected to the peer team that service plans were more of a focus than the budget itself as part of the preparation for budget setting for 2024/25. Cross party budget workshops are a mechanism used by many councils to ensure the focus of budget discussions remains high level and strategic. | It is intended that Service Plans will be prepared and presented to members for consideration earlier and budgets then to be considered in January meetings. | Service Plan in Oct/Nov 24; Budgets in January 25 | Director of Finance | Complete | New service planning process in place this year which has as seen a switch to Directorate Plans. These plans are going to a joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10th December leaving the January meeting free to consider budgets only. |
| Finance | PC-12b | Notwithstanding the robust approach to financial planning, there are a number of areas that represent a financial risk to the council. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The waste and recycling contract – a large overspend is forecast• Housing stock – the financial impact of the stock condition survey• Leisure | These risks are being managed in the following way; Recycling & Waste Contract - ongoing oversight and regular monitoring of performance through financial monitoring reports and the recycling and waste board. Consideration also being given to future direction of travel and models of delivery. Leisure - Ongoing monitoring of performance through the Leisure Strategy Forum., a series of workshops underway to consider future leisure provision. Current review ongoing for Housing including STS and planned maintenance short, medium and long delivery programme - including options appraisal and financial modelling. | Ongoing | Directors of Finance, Housing and Place | In progress | All of the areas identified are currently subject to detailed reviews with good progress being made. |

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

East Devon District Council

Corporate Peer Challenge – 6-8 February 2024

Progress Review – 28 November 2024

Feedback



Corporate Peer Challenge



Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| 1. Introduction | 3 |
| 2. Summary of the approach | 3 |
| 3. Progress Review - Feedback | 4 |
| 4. Final thoughts and next steps | 8 |

1. Introduction

East Devon District Council (EDDC) undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during 6 – 8 February 2024 and promptly published the [full report](#) and an [action plan](#).

The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately ten months after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Receive feedback from peers on the early progress made by the council against the CPC recommendations and the council's RAG rated CPC Action Plan.
- Consider peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs.
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date.

The LGA would like to thank EDDC for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at EDDC took place onsite on 28 November 2024.

The Progress Review focussed on each of the key recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge which took place 6 – 8 February 2024.

For this Progress Review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Kath Marriott, lead peer, Chief Executive Rushcliffe Borough Council
- Mike Every, member peer, Deputy Leader, Cotswold District Council
- Kathryn Trant, peer challenge manager, Local Government Association

3. Progress Review - Feedback

Of the CPC's nine recommendations, the council's RAG rated action plan reports that 89 per cent of actions are completed or progressed and 11 per cent (equivalent to one recommendation) has been paused.

The peer team were pleased to note how much progress had been made by the council since the corporate peer challenge had taken place just nine months earlier. It was clear from the RAG rated action plan and from the presentation received by the peer team on site, that EDDC has made significant progress which was a positive reflection of the hard work that has been undertaken by the council. EDDC has embraced improvement, and this is evidenced in the action plan which includes not only the key recommendations made by the peer team but also includes progress against additional comments and suggestions that were mentioned in the CPC feedback report.

For the purpose of this progress review report, the peer team focused on the nine formal recommendations which are set out below, along with the peer team comments.

Recommendation 1: Recruitment of a Chief Executive

'Progress the plans to recruit a Chief Executive and ensure sufficient capacity at director level to support the leader and councillors with strategic vision and provide vision and direction to staff'.

Recruitment of a permanent Chief Executive has been achieved, and this was followed by recruitment into director level posts so that the executive leadership team (ELT) is now at full strength. This has addressed the capacity issues that were previously providing a challenge. The Chief Executive referenced positive external support and mentoring and the peer team view is that the opportunities to benefit from this support should be taken advantage of by all members of ELT.

Recommendation 2: Consideration of Cabinet working arrangements

'Consider and explore options for Cabinet working arrangements, for example, making space for strategic workshop sessions with senior management so that the

Cabinet can work even more effectively’.

The peer team commend the council for good progress with this recommendation. Good working relationships between Portfolio Holders and directors/assistant directors is evident and demonstrates mutual trust. Most Portfolio Holders are now presenting reports at cabinet which helps to reinforce the line between strategic direction and operational delivery.

Recommendation 3: Invest in councillor and officer development

‘Invest in an ongoing programme of councillor development and training and political awareness training for staff to ensure wider understanding of the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers respectively’.

Progress has been made to address this recommendation and work is ongoing. Audit and Scrutiny development sessions for councillors have been positively received and a working group of councillors will produce a programme of councillor development.

Political awareness training will be delivered to staff. This is important because newer members of staff may not fully understand how a council works or the range of services it provides.

Work is planned on a review of broader staff development and development of role profiles in line with job families. This will help to identify any single points of failure and therefore build resilience.

Whilst there has been progress on internal communication and visibility of senior managers, the peer team would encourage ELT to ensure consistency of communication across the directorates so that the same message is heard organisation wide. This will be appreciated by staff and will help them to feel valued by the council. Take the opportunity to raise visibility of councillors by considering a photo board in reception and at the depots so that staff know names and faces.

Recommendation 4: Streamline the actions in your new council plan

‘As the council’s new council plan is developing, further prioritise the number of actions that sit under the four themes in the new council plan and delegate and

empower staff within the organisation to deliver those actions across the life of the plan’.

The council plan is ambitious, and the peer team recognise that the actions to deliver the plan have been streamlined and prioritised to achieve this recommendation. It is positive to hear that over the life of the council plan, cabinet will regularly review and prioritise the actions.

There is an opportunity now for involving staff in service planning at all levels of the organisation as the ‘golden thread’ runs from the council plan through individual directorate and service plans.

Recommendation 5: Resist the temptation to undertake further external reviews

‘Consolidate the learning and recommendations from the reviews the council has undertaken and focus on addressing the actions arising from the various reports. Continue to build on governance improvements systematically reviewing all elements of the council’s governance and implementing improvements where necessary’.

The peer team recognise that the council has worked on embedding the recommendations from external reviews and that actions are regularly monitored, and progress tracked, either through the Annual Governance Statement or by reporting to cabinet, whichever is appropriate.

In time, the peer team suggest that the council sense checks to ensure due diligence is proportionate on all things such as ensuring the appropriate delegations are in place should a quick decision need to be made.

Recommendation 6: Develop a programme of external engagement and make outwardly focused work a priority for the new Chief Executive

‘Develop external engagement with partners and stakeholders for example, undertake work with town and parish councils to include planning matters and host a regular Developer and Agents Forum that includes officers and the portfolio lead for planning. The new Chief Executive should prioritise work on an external focus and profile for the council; external partners are waiting to work with you at a district, county and regional level’.

The peer team heard of excellent progress with this recommendation such as the Water Summit, the Devolution and Anti-Poverty project, and plans for a town and parish council event and a voluntary sector thank you event.

The peer team would suggest that responsibility for external engagement does not sit only with the Chief Executive but that the wider team of directors help so that diary clashes are mitigated and resilience is brought to the leadership group. The same message applies to the wider cabinet in supporting the leader and deputy leader.

Recommendation 7: Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors

‘Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors to address reputation management and assist with ‘myth busting’. Sense check where the council is now and where it wants to be’.

The peer team heard that progress against this recommendation is paused, however, there is an opportunity for all managers to be involved in internal communications. Staff reflected to the peer team on a recent all staff session which was well received, and they are keen for the next one. Perhaps sharing how often they will take place will help to manage expectations along with outlining how internal communications will operate such as using videos for example.

Recommendation 8: Review visibility with housing tenants

‘Whilst ensuring greater visibility with housing tenants is underway, ensure that engagement with them is effective and meaningful to sense check what they would find valuable to support the relationship between housing tenants and the council, and simultaneously address performance’.

The peer team heard of a number of examples of work undertaken to achieve this recommendation. These include appointing tenants to the housing review board, plans for a ‘getting to know you survey’ to ensure data held is up to date, transactional surveys to assess customer satisfaction with repairs and a tenant event held in August 2024.

The peer team recommend ensuring that relevant financial information is robust, and the council is able to make decisions where needed.

Recommendation 9: Provide direction for leisure and culture provision

'Identify some specific principles for leisure and culture provision that include timescale and budget parameters to ensure a financially sustainable model of service delivery'.

The peer team heard how the council was committed to this work and that workshops had taken place to consider options and challenge the status quo. Leisure services can generate income which would enable you to utilise funding elsewhere. Think about leisure and culture services as a district wide portfolio rather than duplicating activities as the new town leisure centre is developed. The work with consultants will help to identify ways to make provision of leisure services cost and tax efficient, and the council may wish to talk to other councils too about identifying opportunities.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank East Devon District Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review.

We appreciate that senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Paul Clarke (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA) and their e-mail address is paul.clarke@local.gov.uk

Report to: **Cabinet**

Date of Meeting 8 January 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



Appointment to the Devon and Torbay Housing Advisory Group

Report summary:

This report seeks endorsement for the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning to represent the Council on the Devon and Torbay Housing Advisory Group. This will play an important role in advising, informing and influencing the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (DTCCA) to support the delivery of the housing aspects of the devolution deal.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That Cabinet endorses the nomination of the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning to represent the Council on the Devon and Torbay Housing Advisory Group

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that the strategic housing challenges and ambitions are clearly articulated through the work of the Devon and Torbay Housing Advisory Group

Officer: Andy Wood, Director of Place, Email: adwood@eastdevon.gov.uk Tel: 01395 571743

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☒ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Economy
- ☐ Finance and Assets
- ☒ Strategic Planning
- ☒ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

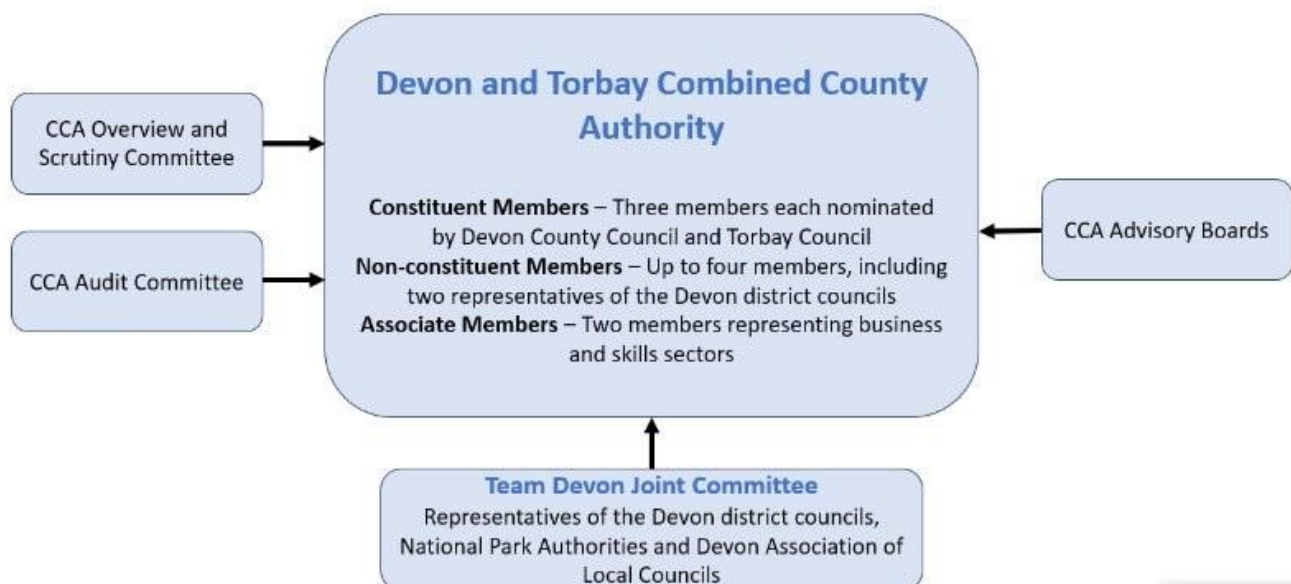
Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
- ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services

Background

1.1 Cabinet last received a report on the proposed Devolution Deal for Devon and Torbay at the February 2024 meeting. A key aspect of this was the proposed creation of a Combined County Authority for Devon and Torbay. The relevant legislation necessary to enable the establishment of this body has recently been laid before the Houses of Parliament. The proposed architecture is set out below;



1.2 The Devon and Torbay Housing Advisory Group (DTHAG) will advise, influence, and inform the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (DTCCA) to support the delivery of the housing aspects of the devolution deal. The group will also have a role in recommending annual priorities, securing investment, and designing appropriate programmes to address the housing needs of communities across the Devon and Torbay area.

1.3 The DTHAG is an advisory group with no formal powers or decision-making responsibilities. It will act in a shadow capacity until the Combined County Authority is formally constituted. The DTHAG will sit within the governance framework of the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority. It will be established through a nomination process with one elected member representing each of the nine local housing authorities.

Context

2.1 Strategic conversations about housing delivery across Devon have been taking place through the Devon Housing Task Force. This is a Member-led cross-party group representing Devon's local authorities looking at housing supply and demand challenges across the County. The council has been a member of the Task Force since it was established in May 2022. In September 2023, the Task Force set up the independent Devon Housing Commission, in partnership with the University of the Exeter.

2.2 The formation of the DTHAG follows a key recommendation of the Devon Housing Commission, namely: *The Commission recommends the CCA should establish a successor body to the Devon's Housing Task Force to provide ongoing monitoring of progress toward the Housing Strategy's goals.* The Devon and Torbay Housing Advisory Group Board (DTHAG) is the "Voice of the housing authorities" within the governance framework of the (DTCCA).

2.3 The overarching objective of the DTHAG is to improve access to safe, secure, high quality housing, across all tenure types, which enables our residents to lead happy and healthy lives, contributing positively to the communities of Devon and Torbay.

2.4 The detailed strategic and operational role of the DTHAG is to advise the DTCCA on matters pertaining to housing. A summary is set out below:

- To work with delivery partners and stakeholders to produce a shared investment pipeline delivering more social, affordable, and low Carbon homes
- To evidence the role that housing can play in delivering improved outcomes across major strategic policy areas such as health, economic growth, social and environmental policy
- To explore the common supply and demand side issues contributing to the Devon housing crisis in the social, affordable, and private housing markets and to consider the potential solutions that might be delivered by taking a collective, sub-regional approach
- To receive the recommendations from the Devon Housing Commission and advise on ways to implement these
- To understand community housing pressures and advise on ways to support, facilitate, and enable greater take up and proliferation of community-led solutions
- To advise the board on measures that could assist in addressing housing solutions for Devon's care leavers and other vulnerable groups
- To strengthen the voices of individual housing and planning authorities; to empower and add value
- To share examples of best practice and opportunities to learn from others at scheme or system level
- To consider strategic alignment of investment options in respect to additional revenues generated by the implementation of the second homes additional council tax charge
- To support the CCA board in any other related areas in order to deliver its ambition and aspiration on matters relating to housing.

2.5 It is important that East Devon's strategic housing challenges and ambitions are clearly articulated through the work of the Devon and Torbay Housing Advisory Group and captured as part of the DTCCA Action Plan.

Proposal

3.1 It is proposed that the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning is nominated to represent the Council on the DTHAG. If agreed, the nominated Member will attend at least four DTHAG meetings per year. Additional meetings can be requested by the Chair or Vice-Chair to discuss issues of significant importance or for urgent decisions. Task and Finish Groups may also be established to facilitate progress on specific themes and issues as required. Devon County Council will continue to provide the secretariat while in shadow form, but once the CCA is formally constituted, the ongoing secretariat responsibilities will need to be agreed by the DTCCA Board.

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications on which to comment.

Legal implications:

It is important that the Council is represented on the Devon and Torbay Housing Advisory Group

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 8 January 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Review date for release N/A



English Devolution White Paper

Report summary:

The English Devolution White Paper sets out the new government's approach to deepening and widening devolution in England. The document places an emphasis on areas adopting a mayoral model to access additional powers and greater financial flexibility. The White Paper also sets out plans to reorganise local government, with an aim to establish larger unitary authorities in two-tier areas and where smaller unitary authorities cannot meet local needs. The report also summarises proposed changes to how strategic planning is dealt with across wider geographies.

Recommendations:

That Cabinet;

Notes the key proposals arising from the English Devolution White Paper, including the proposed introduction of a new devolution framework and the plans for local government reorganisation

Recommends to Council that endorsement is given to the;

- Joint Leaders statement from the Devon Districts Forum
- Potential to promote the establishment of a Mayoral Combined Authority for the peninsular to cover Devon, Plymouth, Torbay and Cornwall
- Need to engage with our communities, partners and stakeholders to develop considered and coherent proposals around changes to the current model of 10 councils in Devon to a smaller number of suitably sized unitaries rather than defaulting to a single unitary approach

Grants delegated authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Council and Corporate Co-ordination to advance negotiations around the form and coverage of future Principal Authorities

Receives a further report in February providing an update on the negotiations before interim proposals are submitted to central government

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure all members are aware of the proposed changes set out in the English Devolution White Paper, particularly those relating to local government reorganisation.

Officers: Tom Winters, Economic Development Manager, email: twinters@eastdevon.gov.uk Andy Wood, Director of Place, email: andy.wood@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☒ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☒ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☒ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☒ Communications and Democracy

- ☒ Economy
- ☒ Finance and Assets
- ☒ Strategic Planning
- ☒ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☒ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: High Risk; Although there is no direct risk associated with the recommendations of the report, members should be aware of the wider impact and risks associated with the proposed changes set out in the White Paper. The White Paper has already precipitated a series of events that will be of seminal importance in determining future local government structures in Devon.

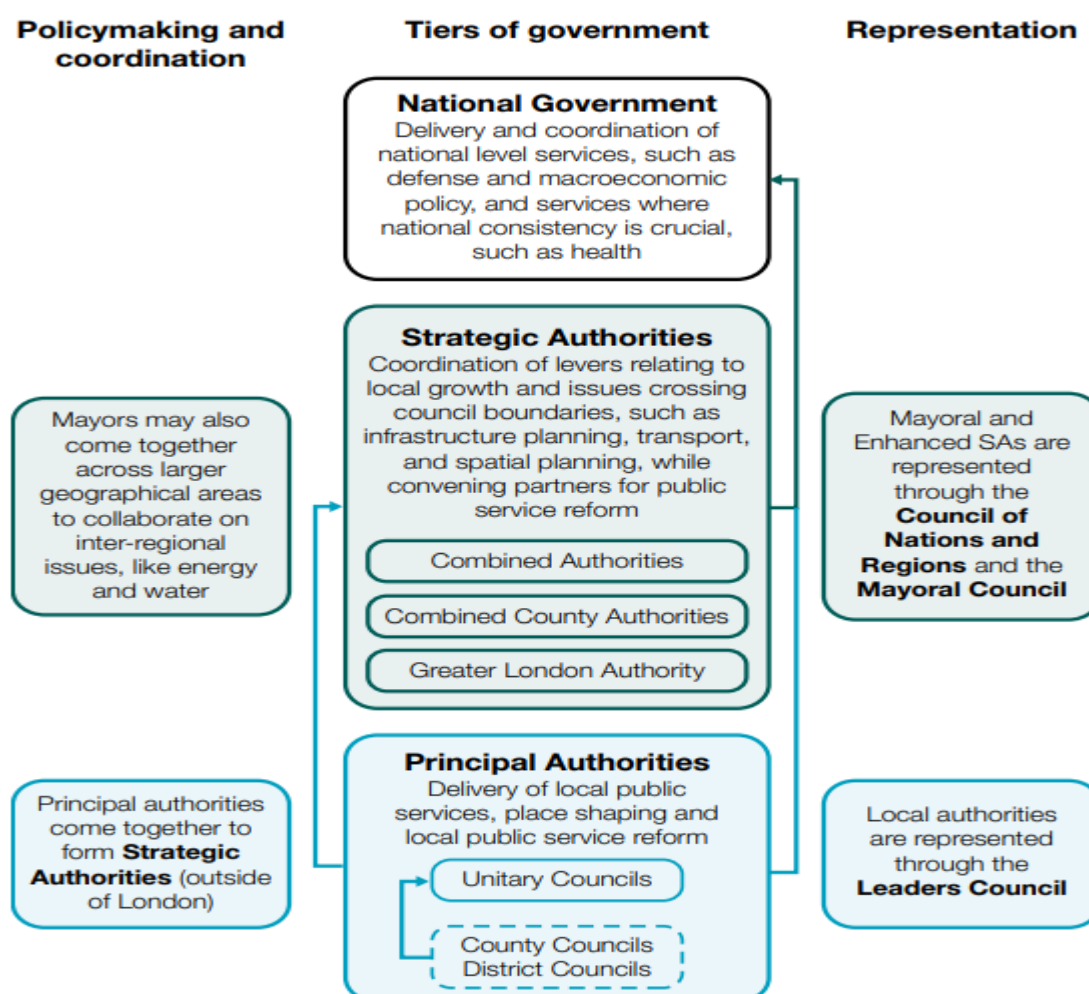
Links to background information [English Devolution White Paper](#), [LGA Devolution White Paper Briefing](#).

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
- ☒ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☒ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services

The chart below is taken directly from the White Paper, illustrating the new links between national and local government as part of an overall approach to streamlining government structures.



Context

1.1 Following the July 2024 election result, the new Labour government committed to publishing a white paper outlining their policies and approaches to devolution. The purpose of this was to replace the framework established by the previous government's Levelling Up White Paper and consequential Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

1.2 The incoming government committed to 'widening and deepening' devolution, with a focus on expanding the mayoral model, ending the deals-based approach and working towards implementing a 'devolution by default' approach.

1.3 The English Devolution White Paper was published on 16 December 2024. This was accompanied by a letter from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (attached at Appendix A).

1.4 This report will focus on the four main points members should be aware of:

- a) Principal Authorities and local government reorganisation
- b) Strategic Authorities and 'devolution by default'
- c) The expansion of powers and funding for mayoral areas
- d) Changes to strategic planning

1.5 Each of the local authorities in Devon are considering the implications arising from the Devolution White Paper at extraordinary full Council meetings. These are scheduled as follows;

- South Hams: 6th January, 10:00
- West Devon: 6th January, 14:00
- Mid Devon: 8th January, 18:00
- Teignbridge: 9th January, 10:00
- Exeter City: 9th January, 18:00
- East Devon: 9th January, 18:00
- North Devon: 9th January 18:30
- Torridge: 9th January 19:00
- Devon County: 9th January, 10:00
- Plymouth City: 9th January, 14:00
- Torbay Council: 9th January, 17:30

Principal Authorities

2.1 The government has confirmed that they will facilitate a programme of local government reorganisation for two tier areas, creating larger unitary authorities. This will also apply to those unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality services for their residents.

2.2 There is an expectation that all affected areas develop locally-led proposals for reorganisation, with existing councils working together to identify the best option for their area. These plans should complement devolution, rather than delay it, whilst avoiding scenarios where competing proposals are developed within a given geography.

2.3 For most areas this will mean creating new unitary councils with a population of 500,000 or more. The government has acknowledged that there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including for devolution. They have also confirmed that decisions on proposals will be made on a case-by-case basis.

2.4 The government claim that unitarisation can cut wasteful duplication of bodies, reduce the number of politicians and reduce fragmentation of public services. It is hoped that there will also be knock-on benefits for strategic planning decisions (see section 5 below).

2.5 The table below shows the total population figures for each district and unitary area in Devon, as taken from the 2021 Census. By way of illustration, the greater Exeter area (including Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge) had a population of 499,192 at the time of the 2021 Census.

| Area | Population |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| East Devon | 150,828 |
| Exeter | 130,709 |
| Mid Devon | 82,852 |
| North Devon | 98,611 |
| South Hams | 88,627 |
| Teignbridge | 134,803 |
| Torridge | 68,114 |
| West Devon | 57,096 |
| Plymouth (Unitary) | 264,695 |
| Torbay (Unitary) | 139,324 |
| <i>Devon (County Council)</i> | <i>811,640</i> |
| <i>Devon (Ceremonial)</i> | <i>1,215,659</i> |

Strategic Authorities

3.1 The White paper outlines how the government will create, in law, the concept of a Strategic Authority. There will be two types of Strategic Authority:

- a) Foundation Strategic Authorities: this will automatically include non-mayoral Combined County Authorities (such as the Devon and Torbay CCA), and any Local Authority designated as a Strategic Authority without a Mayor.
- b) Mayoral Strategic Authorities: this will automatically include all Mayoral Combined Authorities.

3.2 The default assumption is for Strategic Authorities to have a combined population of 1.5 million or above. The government has acknowledged that in some places, smaller authorities may be necessary.

3.3 Strategic Authorities must cover sensible economic geographies with a particular focus on functional economic areas, travel-to-work patterns and local labour markets. Where these areas are small, a Strategic Authority will cover multiple travel to work areas.

3.4 Local identity should also factor into the boundaries of Strategic Authorities. Geographies should also align with existing or new Local Authority boundaries (following any reorganisation) and other public sector service boundaries.

3.5 The government's strong preference is for partnerships that bring more than one Local Authority together over a large geography. In exceptional circumstances, a single Local Authority can also become a Foundation Strategic Authority, but cannot become a Mayoral Strategic Authority. This is because the government believes that conflating the separate responsibilities of a Local Authority and a Mayor into the same individual/institution would risk the optimal delivery of both. This could, for example, prevent Cornwall from establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority if it wished to explore this option.

3.6 Where local leaders cannot agree on the right geography, a ministerial directive will be applied, enabling the government to create Strategic Authorities when all other routes have been exhausted.

3.7 Should leaders in Devon wish to proceed with a mayoral model, or leave this option open for future consideration, the White Paper presents two main options for our area when it comes to reorganisation and establishing a Strategic Authority:

- a) At least two unitary Local Authorities are formed, covered by one Strategic Authority for the ceremonial county of Devon.
- b) One unitary Local Authority is formed covering the ceremonial county of Devon, along with a Strategy Authority covering Devon and at least one other neighbouring Local Authority (Cornwall for example).

Mayoral Powers

4.1 A statutory Devolution Framework will set out a suite of new powers and processes which will provide blanket coverage of all Strategic Authorities in England, at least to the 'foundational' level. The government's end ambition is for all parts of the country to move towards a mayoral model.

4.2 The list below includes the areas where Strategic Authorities are expected to act strategically to drive growth and support the shaping of public services, where strategic level coordination adds value:

- a) Transport and local infrastructure
- b) Skills and employment support
- c) Housing and strategic planning
- d) Economic development and regeneration
- e) Environment and climate change.
- f) Health, wellbeing and public service reform
- g) Public safety

4.3 The vast majority of new powers will be set exclusively for areas with a Mayor. Whereas the agreed devolution deal for Devon and Torbay was set at 'Level 2' of three tiers, the new framework would bring the Devon and Torbay deal to a baseline Level 1 equivalent status.

4.4 Areas with a Mayor which meet specified eligibility criteria may apply to become designated as an Established Mayoral Strategic Authority, unlocking access to further powers and an Integrated Settlement: a single combined funding package allowing for greater flexibility.

4.5 Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be able to propose, individually or with others, additional functions to be added to the statutory Devolution Framework, which can be piloted locally. Successful pilots will then be considered for addition to the framework.

4.6 A full list of powers, functions and abilities under the new Devolution Framework can be found online ([see pp. 86-90 of the English Devolution White Paper](#)).

Strategic Planning

5.1 The White Paper sets out that all areas will be required to develop Spatial Development Strategies over a strategic geography and within a defined timeframe, regardless of the devolution model agreed.

5.2 Local Plans will need to be in general conformity with these high-level documents. The responsibility for detailed policy-making and site allocations will remain with Local Authorities through their Local Plans.

5.3 For mayoral areas, Mayors will be empowered to develop and propose Spatial Development Strategies. Mayors will also have access to development management powers allowing them to intervene in planning applications of potential strategic importance. For non-mayoral areas

covering multiple Local Authorities, members will need to work together to deliver Spatial Development Strategies.

Assessment

6.1 The Devolution White Paper is of seminal importance for the Council and the communities that we serve. It represents a significant shift in direction from the devolution framework previously set out in the Levelling Up White Paper (2022). In particular it signals a far more strident and directive approach to securing universal coverage as opposed to negotiating devolution deals on a case-by-case basis. Alongside the streamlining of local government structures there is an explicit preference for Mayors. This is backed up by incentives, such as the promise of integrated settlements and more flexible powers, as well as the threat of Ministerial directions if consensus cannot be reached. The policy intent extends beyond local government and seeks to align wider public service boundaries such as job centres, police, probation, fire and health.

6.2 Responding to the White Paper presents a rare challenge for the Council, working alongside our peers and stakeholders. It is clear that this needs to consider how both strategic and principal authorities can be constituted to best effect. There are a number of potential building blocks for this, including existing local government areas alongside functional geographies including housing and labour markets (as represented by travel to work areas). But, as the contrasting coverage of the current police (Devon and Cornwall) and fire & rescue services (Devon and Somerset) highlights, it is difficult to discern a single 'uber' geography to which ever public service naturally snaps.

6.3 In relation to the coverage of Strategic Authorities experience elsewhere in the country highlights that new partnerships are being forged. For example Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire Councils are promoting the creation of a new Heart of Wessex Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) that will also become the Strategic Authority. There is considered to be a particular opportunity to promote an equivalent arrangement for the peninsular covering Devon, Plymouth, Torbay and Cornwall. This would exceed the guideline population threshold of 1.5m people and bring together an area that includes established industries, such as tourism, together with key growth sectors such as advanced manufacturing, clean energy, digital and professional services.

6.4 The need to secure access to the types of investment and funding streams that a mayoral arrangement would unlock is particularly acute in a District such as East Devon due to the significant growth agenda with the highest rates of housing delivery and economic growth across the peninsular. Subsequently it is a specific recommendation of this report that the potential to establish a Mayoral Combined Authority for the peninsular geography is endorsed. This would be as a successor to the ongoing establishment of a Combined County Authority for Devon and Torbay. The CCA will become a Foundation Strategic Authority under the terms of the White Paper. As the name suggests, this would be very much at the bottom end of the range in terms of accessing powers and finances.

6.5 In terms of constituting Principal Authorities there are considered to be a number of potential permutations as set out below. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive and regard will need to be paid to the guideline that new unitary authorities should have a minimum population of 500k people.

- 1) A single unitary Council covering Devon – this is likely to be favoured by the County Council
- 2) Two Unitary Councils covering Devon, potential constructed on a north/south or east/west axis. This option is favoured by the majority of the Devon Districts
- 3) Potential combinations with the existing unitaries of Plymouth and/or Torbay
- 4) Creation of a new Exeter Unitary Council – this option is favoured by Exeter City Council. With a current population of around 130k the City is though significantly below the 500k threshold for unitary councils set out in the White Paper. It remains to be seen whether a new administrative boundary for this unitary council, which potentially splits existing District boundaries, is advocated.

6.6 There is no doubt that the negotiations necessary to resolve the way forward in a Devon setting will be delicate and potentially divisive. Nonetheless there is a clear expectation in the White Paper that, as far as possible, consensus is reached. The Leaders of the eight Devon Districts have already issued a joint statement (Appendix B) opposing the single Devon unitary option and advocating further consultation with residents, businesses, elected representatives, and stakeholders.

6.7 It is a specific recommendation of this report that this statement is endorsed. Furthermore it is recommended that authority is delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Council and Corporate Co-ordination to advance these negotiations and ensure that the best interests of East Devon residents are represented.

Next Steps

7.1 The White Paper signals an intent for the majority of key reforms to be in situ by the end of the current parliamentary term. This includes coverage of Spatial Development Strategies for example. In terms of Local Government Reorganisation there will be a phased approach to delivery, taking into account where reorganisation can unlock devolution. A new Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) will be introduced for those areas seeking to deepen and broaden devolution proposals.

7.2 Ministers intend to formally invite unitary proposals in January 2025. This should set out their criteria for sustainable unitary structures, how and when to submit proposals and how the government intends to respond to proposals. It likely that interim plans will then need to be submitted in March 2025. The subsequent deadline for formal proposals will then be as follows;

- May 2025 for areas that want to move at pace with LGR to unlock future devolution, where County Council elections would also be postponed
- Autumn 2025 for areas that are part of the DPP, where council elections have been postponed
- Autumn 2025 for other areas, with Council elections going ahead in May 2025

The expectation is that new Unitaries will go live in either April 2027 or April 2028 depending upon capacity and the devolution proposals in the area.

7.3 An immediate issue therefore becomes whether a request to delay the County Council elections planned for May 2025 is made by the requisite deadline of Friday 10th January. This request can only come from the County Council. A special meeting of the County Council has been arranged for 10:00 on the 9th January 2025 in this respect. A verbal update on the outcome of this meeting will be given at the extraordinary EDDC Council meeting that is also scheduled for the 9th.

Conclusion

8.1 The publication of the Devolution White Paper marks a very important milestone. As well moving to a position of devolution by default, it also sets out a twin pronged approach with local government reorganisation. There is considerable emphasis placed on the role of Mayors, with associated structures able to access the most far reaching and flexible powers including integrated financial settlements. Universal coverage of Strategic Authorities will provide delineation between strategic decisions and front line service delivery.

8.2 There are potentially a number of different options that future local government structures could take in Devon in conjunction with wider devolution proposals. Close partnership working will be required with our peers and stakeholders in order to consider and develop these options including how they best serve the needs of East Devon communities moving forward.

Financial implications:

There is no direct financial request being made in this report to affect the immediate financial position of the Council, however the implications of devolution and future funding for the area needs to be carefully considered by members.

Legal implications:

There are no significant legal implications at this stage as the report simply updates Cabinet on the government white paper and the options available moving forward. The process for taking any proposals forward will be clarified by the Secretary of State in due course.



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution*

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

To: Leaders of all two-tier councils and
neighbouring unitary authorities

16 December 2024

Dear Leaders

The English Devolution White Paper published today sets out how the Government plans to deliver on our manifesto pledge to transfer power out of Westminster through devolution and to fix the foundations of local government. You will receive under separate cover a letter outlining the ambition and key elements of the White Paper, but I also wanted to write to areas which might be in scope for a joint programme of devolution and local government reorganisation, to set out a clear process and key milestones.

The Government's long-term vision is for simpler structures which make it much clearer for residents who they should look to on local issues, with fewer politicians able to focus on delivering. Local government reorganisation, alongside devolution over a large strategic geography, can drive economic growth whilst delivering optimal public services. To help deliver these aims, we will facilitate local government reorganisation in England for two-tier areas and for unitary councils where there is evidence of failure, or where their size or boundaries may be hindering an ability to deliver sustainable, high-quality public services.

Given how much interest there has been, and will continue to be in this programme, I am writing now to all councils in two-tier areas, and to neighbouring smaller unitary authorities, to give you further detail and to set out our plans to work with you over the coming months.

Local government reorganisation

My intention is to formally invite unitary proposals in January 2025 from all councils in two-tier areas, and small neighbouring unitary councils. In this invitation, I will set out further detail on the criteria I will consider when taking decisions on the proposals that are submitted to Government. I intend to ask for interim plans by March 2025.

As set out in the White Paper, new unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas, this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more. However, there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including on devolution. Final decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. We will ask you to work with other councils in your area to develop unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area, rather than developing competing proposals.

Devolution

We are clear that reorganisation should not delay devolution. Plans should be complementary, with devolution remaining the overarching priority. In January, we will therefore also set out which areas will be included in our Devolution Priority Programme, aimed at places ready to come together under the sensible geography criteria set out in the White Paper and wishing to progress to an accelerated timescale. This will be with a view to inaugural mayoral elections in May 2026. This is an exciting programme and there has already been significant interest even before the White Paper was published.

I am aware that different places will be in different stages of their devolution journey. While some will already have an existing strategic authority, others may be in the process of establishing one, and others still may need reorganisation to take place before they can fully benefit from devolution.

I also understand that delivering these ambitious plans for devolution and for local government reorganisation will be a significant change. It will be essential for councils to work with local partners, including MPs, to develop plans for sustainable unitary structures capable of delivering the high-quality public services that residents need and deserve.

Transition and implementation

We are under no illusion about the scale of issues facing local government. It is in all our interests to make sure we are avoiding unnecessary spend at a time when budgets are already tight, so we will be working with sector partners to avoid use of expensive consultants wherever possible.

My department will be working closely with the Local Government Association, District Councils Network, County Councils Network and others, to develop a shared understanding of how reorganisation can deliver the best outcomes for local residents and businesses. We have a collective responsibility to ensure councils are better supported throughout reorganisation. This will include preparing robust proposals with evidence, standing up new unitary councils ready for vesting day and work to deliver the significant opportunities that are possible by creating suitably sized unitary structures. We will take a phased approach and expect to deliver new unitary authorities in April 2027 and 2028.

Timelines and next steps

I have heard from some areas that the timing of elections affects their planning for devolution, particularly alongside reorganisation. To help manage these demands, alongside our objectives on devolution, and subject to meeting the timetable outlined in this letter, I am minded to lay secondary legislation to postpone local council elections from May 2025 to May 2026.

However, I will only do this where this will help the area to deliver both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe – either through the Devolution Priority Programme or where reorganisation is necessary to unlock devolution or open up new devolution options. There will be two scenarios in which I will be willing to postpone elections;

- Areas who are minded to join the Devolution Priority Programme, where they will be invited to submit reorganisation proposals to Government by Autumn 2025.
- Areas who need reorganisation to unlock devolution, where they will be invited to submit reorganisation proposals to Government by May 2025.

For any area in which elections are postponed, we will work with areas to move to elections to new 'shadow' unitary councils as soon as possible as is the usual arrangement in the process of local government reorganisation.

For all other areas elections will take place as scheduled in May 2025, and I will invite in January proposals for reorganisation to be submitted to Government by Autumn 2025.

To lay the relevant legislation to postpone elections, I will need a clear commitment to devolution and reorganisation aims from upper-tier councils in an area, including a request from the council/s whose election is to be postponed, on or before Friday 10 January. This request must set out how postponing the election would enable the council to make progress with reorganisation and devolution in parallel on the Devolution Priority Programme, or would speed up reorganisation and enable the area to benefit from devolution as quickly as possible once new unitary structures are in place.

I am working together with my colleague and fellow Minister, Baroness Taylor, who will host a webinar with leaders and chief executives of councils to discuss the next steps I have outlined in this letter. I hope you will be able to attend that discussion.

I welcome your views on any matters raised in this letter. As set out above, I will require a clear commitment to delivering both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe, with any request to delay council elections by Friday 10 January. Please respond or direct any queries to EnglishDevolutionLGENquiries@communities.gov.uk.

I look forward to working with you to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable structures for local government. I am copying this letter to council Chief Executives, and where relevant to Best Value Commissioners. I am also copying this letter to local Members of Parliament, and where relevant to Mayors of combined (county) authorities, and Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioners.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim McMahon." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

JIM MCMAHON OBE MP

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution

Appendix B

Joint statement: Devon District Councils – update on devolution and local government reform – Friday 3rd January 2025

This joint statement is made following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper

“The Devon districts are fully supportive of genuine devolution of powers from Whitehall to local government.

“However, following the publication of the Devolution White Paper, and subsequent statements by the leader of Devon County Council, we would like to make it clear that we do not support the creation of one unitary council for Devon.

“Our county, including Torbay, is diverse and made up of nearly 1 million residents across urban, coastal, and rural areas. Any reform of local government in Devon should follow a period of proper consultation with residents, businesses, elected representatives, and stakeholders. Looking at the evidence, we should decide collectively what is best for our area. A single unitary council for the county risks diminishing local representation, with decision-making that is remote from the communities we serve.

“We do not support postponing the county council elections scheduled for May 2025. The government has indicated that this will only happen in priority areas who have clear and agreed plans. This is not the case in Devon, so we cannot be in the first phase of these reforms.

“We recognise that the government’s white paper sets a clear direction of travel. As Devon’s city, district, and borough council leaders, we want to work collaboratively with others in particular with our neighbouring unitary councils to agree how we respond to this. Any changes must be carefully considered, transparent, and inclusive, ensuring that residents and businesses are fully engaged in shaping the future governance of Devon.

“Our objective must be to get this right for our residents and businesses. That cannot be achieved if we make rushed decisions that have not been given the serious consideration that they deserve.”

Statement agreed by the following leaders:

Cllr Paul Arnott, East Devon

Cllr Phil Bialyk, Exeter

Cllr Julian Brazil, South Hams

Cllr David Clayton, North Devon

Cllr Mandy Ewings, West Devon

Cllr Ken James, Torridge

Cllr Richard Keeling, Teignbridge

Cllr Luke Taylor, Mid Devon