

Poverty: review of council activities 2019-2020

Introduction: work pre-dating the Poverty Strategy

This brief overview of activities has been compiled from information readily available from East Devon District Council's published Service Plans, published here: <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/strategies-policies-and-performance/our-plans/service-plans/>

It is not a comprehensive list of all activities, but provides a flavour of work by services which pre-dated the Poverty Strategy. In structure it follows the five themes identified in the new Strategy.

1. Helping people on low incomes

Helping people on low incomes to maximise their household income and minimise their costs, building financial resilience and reducing indebtedness.

- i. In 2018/19 we were the second highest council to process new benefit claims out of Devon and Cornwall authorities, and 8th highest in the South West. We were the joint quickest to process changes in circumstances out of Devon and Cornwall authorities, and the 5th highest in the South West.
- ii. Our combined performance for processing both new benefit claims and changes in circumstances was the quickest of Devon and Cornwall authorities; we ranked 1st in Devon and Cornwall & 9th in the South West.

2. Strengthening families and communities

Strengthening families and communities, including supporting groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty, and community and voluntary groups working to combat poverty.

- i. We delivered a range of projects and interventions as set out in the East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership Action Plan for 2018-2021, designed to make our communities less vulnerable and more resilient, to tackle those at risk of exploitation and to reduce the impact of anti-social behaviour. We tackled a number of cases involving antisocial behaviour and began to focus on the "youth" element of our communities to prevent future offending. In Axminster we secured funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner to support youth outreach activities. In Exmouth we tackled a visible issue with homelessness in the town working closely with police and housing officers under the "Safe Streets" banner. The Safer Devon Partnership developed an online toolkit to tackle the threat of exploitation, which we are using to develop in-house training for our frontline staff.
- ii. The Place and Prosperity and Growth teams co-ordinated and developed evidence-based submissions to the House of Lords Select Committees for Regenerating Seaside Towns / Rural Economies.

- iii. The Cranbrook Plan Development Plan Document was consulted on and examined. The plan provides a template for the future development of the town and seeks to ensure a high quality of development that will be delivered alongside the necessary infrastructure.
- iv. The Planning team helped our communities spend over £268,000 of Section 106 monies on community-led infrastructure projects.
- v. Countryside's outreach work programme delivered continuing work with Switch groups and children's centres, and worked with over 1,000 children as part of our Housing outreach partnership.
- vi. Thelma Hulbert Gallery's *Out and About* worked outdoors to engage diverse audiences through participatory, interactive and unusual creative processes.
- vii. At least 25 community groups attended introductory sessions of Crowdfund East Devon, with at least 50% of available funding distributed.
- viii. Streetscene delivered 300 litter pickers to over 60 community groups to help support their volunteer litter picking work using a government grant.

3. Inclusive economy

Promoting an inclusive economy, by raising skills and improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes.

- i. Two apprentices were successfully introduced into Planning's Development Management Team and took on the validation of new planning applications.
- ii. Licensing introduced an awareness campaign *No Excuse for Abuse* working in partnership with the taxi trade, members and key partners [Taxi Licensing (Driver & Public Safety)]. Other Devon authorities planned to emulate in 2020.
- iii. Bids were submitted to multiple funding streams including MHCLG's Garden Communities programme, the One Public Estate initiative and the Future High Streets Fund.
- iv. Support was provided to bring forward development in Cranbrook town centre. This included commissioning commercial advice and a business planning exercise for the Town Council building.
- v. Further investment decisions were made within the Enterprise Zone designation, to continue to unlock and bring forward development. The level of employment at the Science Park was on track to reach 700 in 2020.
- vi. The number of businesses which secured HM Treasury funded rate relief in the Enterprise Zone continued to grow, helping to support the take-up of new commercial space.

- vii. Growth Hub business support provided a free single point of contact for all businesses seeking advice and support on any issues relating to the operations and aspirations of their business. As of August 2019, more businesses had benefitted from Growth Hub support in East Devon than in any of the other 14 LEP districts.
- viii. The East Devon Enhancing Productivity (EDEP) Programme offered fully funded workshops and one-to-one support for prestart and existing businesses across East Devon. The project delivered ahead of target and we funded additional support to meet the sustained demand from businesses.
- ix. Exmouth's Propeller Group has been successfully growing its collaborative incubator space with the support of discretionary rate relief. As well as providing a workspace for people to collaborate, the group delivers networking, innovative events, and was developing an education programme to help businesses grow and provide valuable jobs in the developing local tech sector.
- x. The Growth team supported key local employers who were experiencing challenging conditions. This included a rapid redundancy response for Axminster Carpets Ltd where an information and advice session was held in October. The event featured Job Centre Plus, Business Information Point, Axminster Job Club, and others. Alongside the County Council, LEP and Airport, the team engaged with Flybe following acquisition by new owners.
- xi. Quarterly Business Newsletters were developed and are disseminated to increase awareness among local businesses of relevant training, funding and wider support opportunities.
- xii. 2019 FSB Award for Building Greater Exeter, was an active collaboration between Exeter, East Devon, Teignbridge District Councils and industry to support local people gaining construction skills and employment opportunities through apprenticeships and diverse training initiatives.

4. Housing

Addressing the high cost of housing, improving housing conditions, creating affordable warmth and reducing homelessness.

- i. New guidance on the provision of affordable housing was prepared and consulted on as a proposed draft supplementary planning document. This should achieve improved provision of affordable housing on new developments.
- ii. Planning and Environmental Health introduced a formal health impact assessment of significant new housing developments including a validation checklist, working with Liverpool University.
- iii. Housing developed processes to deliver formal valuations of council dwellings in connection with disposals under the *Right To Buy* scheme and by doing so removed the need to outsource.

- iv. Housing Options team assisted people affected by fire in a block of privately rented flats following an arson attack in Seaton. This included re-housing several vulnerable households. The residents' needs were met with offers of emergency short-term accommodation as well as longer term as many of the flats were subsequently classed as uninhabitable.
- v. Many people who approach Housing Options team have limited access to furniture and household items, so the team looked for opportunities to re-use and recycle items, because providing a 'shell' of a property without essential household items can disadvantage people significantly and can be a barrier to sustaining a tenancy.
- vi. The new Homelessness Strategy was produced and published, with an ongoing action plan and a working review party which includes former service users.
- vii. The Housing Options team evolved to adapt to additional demands on the homelessness service, including the additional responsibilities of the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- viii. £93,000 of additional funding was secured from central government to tackle homelessness and in particular rough sleeping, including setting up the district's *Housing First* project.
- ix. The second year of the 'Your Home, Your Wellbeing' study was completed; a longitudinal study that monitors factors that impact on tenants' wellbeing as well as people on our waiting list for council housing.
- x. A block of 12 flats in the centre of Exmouth were purchased, being of the type of housing most needed, in the most desired town in the District.
- xi. A successful kitchen and bathroom modernisation programme received high levels of tenant satisfaction.
- xii. Sixteen empty homes were brought back into use across the district through direct intervention from Private Sector Housing team.
- xiii. Our Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) programme was maintained and introduced the Devon-wide Housing Assistance Policy, offering more variety of grant assistance, an increase in ECO Flex top-ups and loan applications.

5. Improving health outcomes

Aiming to improving health outcomes for people on low incomes, including access to good diet, health care and ill health prevention.

- i. Council teams supported and facilitated Sport England's Local Delivery Pilot programme towards Cranbrook achieving its aims:
 - Worked with *Move More Cranbrook* community group to develop its constitution and funding application framework to develop programme of project bids for community sports groups and facilities

- Pilot programme secured over £250K investment into Cranbrook through setting up a Test & Learn fund, Community Chest fund and funding towards Cranbrook Project Coordinator post
 - Established Cranbrook Steering Group with key partners to ensure focus on investing in and supporting Cranbrook's aims
 - Worked with Cranbrook Town Council to utilise town's green spaces for park runs, active family events, community run events
 - Worked with LED, Cranbrook GPs & RD&E to help set a social prescribing initiative with a Health Coach helping to tackle preventable health issues e.g. obesity, diabetes etc.
- ii. Queen's Drive Space remained open throughout the year providing seating and a free play area for children; these facilities contribute to wellbeing for people who visit the site.
- iii. To help more people to be healthy and stay healthy over the year we have researched and shared health-information including:
- Ongoing flow of tweets researched & tweeted – c 150 between April and Oct '19 e.g. ranging from food safety, to measles awareness to fuel poverty campaigns
 - Written copy for staff, residents, tenants and taxi drivers' newsletters, e.g. "new year new you"; smoking cessation; climate emergency
 - Ordered resources / posters/ leaflets etc. and delivered to third sector groups such as HALFF, Exmouth Open Door; parish and town councils
 - Shared information about funding opportunities to local third sector groups.
- iv. We arranged and evaluated four MECC [*making every contact count*] sessions for community groups across the WEB area; two in Axminster and facilitated MECC awareness for Members in Oct '19. DCC stated that East Devon has made substantially the most progress leading to most referrals.
- v. Supported the head teacher to arrange Littleham Primary School health and wellbeing week, and negotiated subsequent support with forest school classes.
- vi. Offered support to member of public in Axminster setting up holiday-hunger scheme, summer '19.
- vii. The Place and Prosperity team facilitated a storage facility for Seaton Parkrun. Parkrun events offered health and wellbeing benefits to all those taking part. The Parkrun received referrals from the local surgery in Seaton.
- viii. Streetscene increased our range of cultural events and engagement activities ensuring all major parks have an event during the year which offers opportunities for health & wellbeing, for example our Beach Rugby and gig rowing events in the summer.

Helen Wharam

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