

Report to: **Council**



Date of Meeting 10 December 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Questions on Notice

Report summary:

The constitution provides that members of Council may ask: the Chair, the Leader or a Portfolio Holder Member of the Cabinet; or the Chair of any Committee or Sub Committee a question on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the district.

A member may only ask a question if either:

(a) they have given at least 3 working days' notice in writing of the question to the Chief Executive; or

(b) the question relates to urgent matters, they have the consent of the Chair to whom the question is to be put and the content of the question is given to the Chief Executive by noon on the day of the meeting.

In response to a question on notice an answer may take the form of:

(a) A direct oral answer;

(b) Where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication; or

(c) Where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to the questioner.

In accordance with the Constitution three questions on notice have been received and they are set out in the report with the responses.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

To note the responses to the questions on notice.

Reason for recommendation:

In accordance with the Council's Constitution Rules Part 4, 9.2 Questions on notice at full Council; 9.3 Notice of questions.

Question	Question from	Question	Response
1	Cllr Mike Goodman	<p>Question to Portfolio Environment Operations & Portfolio Holder for Environment Nature & Climate</p> <p>East Devon is an area of outstanding natural beauty. In November 2023 this was re-named National landscapes. Could I ask if the signs could be changed to reflect the new name.</p>	<p>Portfolio Environment Operations & Portfolio Holder for Environment Nature & Climate</p> <p>East Devon National Landscape team are currently working with National Highways to get the road signs replaced to reflect the new branding. Changes in National Highway's local resources have caused delays but this work is now moving forward with the replacement plans. The East Devon National Landscape team will update Members with timelines and locations once the replacement programme has been formally signed off. Also to note that all footpath signs have now been updated with the new National Landscape branding.</p>
2	Cllr Mike Goodman	<p>Question to Portfolio Environment Operations & Portfolio Holder for Environment Nature & Climate</p> <p>Sidmouth Town Council with the Arboretum set a target of planting 14,000 trees they have now achieved this and have come in under budget which is a great achievement for the town. EDDC in June agreed a tree strategy and set a target of increasing tree canopy coverage in the County. Could council have an update on progress made please.</p>	<p>Portfolio Environment Operations & Portfolio Holder for Environment Nature & Climate</p> <p>First of all, a note of congratulations to Sidmouth Arboretum for achieving their target and helping the district to achieve its 30% Tree Canopy Cover target by 2034. The district currently has a canopy cover of 21.7% set against the canopy cover of 16.7% for England. Therefore, East Devon is well placed to achieve its ambition within the next 10 years of the Strategy's target. It is also important to remind Members that the Tree, Hedge & Woodland Strategy is for East Devon and is a 10 year plan that will require the support and co-operation of organisations such as the National Trust, Woodland Trust,</p>

			<p>Forestry Commission, local landowners, Town and Parishes to help us deliver on the 30% canopy cover target. So, the planting that has been achieved in Sidmouth is an excellent example of this wider partnership working for the whole of East Devon.</p> <p>Cllr Goodman has noted that the Strategy was adopted by Full Council 4 months ago and he will also know that the Strategy's 10-year Delivery Plan was integrated into the existing workstreams of teams such as Countryside, Streetscene and Housing where opportunities lie for tree planting schemes. There has been no additional resource on top of business as usual to deliver the Strategy however we can report steady progress is being made.</p> <p>The Countryside, Environment & Ecology (CEE) Service have created momentum targeting the next 3 years before LGR with a number of initiatives and projects that will be delivered by both our internal teams and much closer engagement with our communities and partners. The activities that have been developed and are in the pipeline from the THaWS Delivery Plan 2024-2034 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of the East Devon Tree Champion scheme in November which is being led by our Countryside team and this will help us to start a more meaningful engagement with local communities in areas such as tree planting schemes to help us achieve our 30% tree canopy cover target by 2034; • Internal discussions between Streetscene and Countryside identifying Council owned land where we can create tree
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			<p>planting schemes again as part of our tree canopy cover target have started and a programme of tree planting working with local communities on suitable land will commence in 2026/27;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDDC's Countryside, Environment & Ecology (CEE) Service as part of the Saving Devon's Treescape project has developed a business case with EDDC's Green Team to support Broadclyst Community Tree Nursery for 3 years to include opportunities for training other community groups that will help provide trees of local provenance for future local tree planting schemes (a decision is expected in January 2026 on funding); • Tree cover in Cranbrook is increasing through development phases – significant quantities of trees will be planted within 78 Ha of SANG (first phase in Reserved Matters planning at the moment). Cranbrook TC have a tree planting programme in Cranbrook Country Park this winter (with 3,500 trees planted last winter). • We transferred £25k of S106 funding to Saving Devon's Treescapes to enable them to source match funding for tree planting across Devon, and specifically 3,000 trees in Poltimore/Broadclyst parishes which will be planted on 2-3 sites this winter. • We are planting c1,600 trees (in hedgerows/scrub, plus some orchard trees) over next 12-18 months. These are supplied from the Broadclyst nursery. Countryside's Nature Reserves Ranger has organised a volunteer tree
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			<p>planting day on 17th December 2025 and all Councillors would be welcome to join in this activity. There will be further opportunities in the new year. In addition Percy Wakley Woods, near Cranbrook, will become our new 5.4Ha woodland SANG within which we will be investing in enhanced management of the woods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Trust Killerton planted circa 70,000 trees last winter, and have a similar number planned for this winter. Their target is 1 million trees by 2030 (they have planted circa 250,000 to date). Their Three Rivers Landscape Recovery project will deliver significant areas of landscape restoration including tree and hedgerow planting which will significantly contribute to the Strategy's 30% Tree Canopy Cover target and the Clyst Valley Regional Park programme has significant tree planting targets to achieve within its masterplan. • Alongside key partners such as the National Trust there are other landowners such as Clinton Devon Estates who have developed their Heaths to Sea Landscape Recovery schemes and the Luppitt Landscape Recovery scheme which all have significant planting schemes in their 80 year vision that will again move our canopy cover target in the right direction. • EDDC's SANG strategy for 100Ha of Strategic SANG, plus SANG on major development sites, create opportunities for significant tree planting.
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exmouth TC have mentioned to our CEE Service that their Rotary Club are looking for sites for more micro-forests which we will be looking to help support and set up once more details are known. • In terms of our management of hedges and woodlands we have recently developed a Seaton Wetland hedgerow management plan and there is a programme of traditional hedge laying training identified within it led by the Countryside team to ensure we are managing our hedgerow network for wildlife as we are doing our woodland Local Nature Reserves at Holyford Woods and Knapp Copse. <p>The Council's internal teams have made steady progress on several key actions in the Strategy over the past four months, as shown above.</p> <p>However, it is extremely important to reiterate that it is only through active collaboration with partners and local communities that we can meet our 30% Tree Canopy Cover target by 2034. The launch of our Tree Champion scheme is our first significant step to making our communities more resilient when it comes to identifying land for planting and then looking after their newly created woodland.</p>
3	Cllr Mike Goodman	<p>Question to Leader of Council</p> <p>In March in this chamber the Leader proposed and voted for the 5-4-1 unitary solution for East Devon. In November he worked on and proposed a 9 1 1 solution for Devon, this proposed three unitaries Plymouth, Torbay and the rest of Devon. When</p>	<p>Leader of Council</p> <p>I am very glad to take the opportunity provided by Cllr Goodman to address the matter of LGR, which sits in the wider context of his role as Chair of the Devon Conservatives Mike Goodman Devon Area. Cllr Goodman has offered implied</p>

		<p>the Devon County Council Cabinet voted Cllr Arnott surprisingly having proposed the motion abstained. This is confusing, can Council and residents be told what the Leader believes is the right solution for East Devon.</p>	<p>criticism of my conduct which he has been aware I have been unable to answer until after submission. Devon authority changes need to be clear and coherent Sidmouth Herald. It is worth noting that at no time has he attempted to discuss this with me.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The context in which Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) sits is worth recalling. Although Devolution and Strategic Mayoral Authorities were in the July 2024 Labour manifesto, LGR was not. As late as the Local Government Association Conference in Harrogate in October 2024, ministers were denying rumours that LGR would be attempted. 2. In December 2024, all councils were written to be MHCLG to say they would be required to prepare outline plans for LGR by March. 3. Cllr Goodman's Conservative County administration (he has been Devon chair since January), instead of doing substantial preparatory work, at first attempted in February to cancel the May 2025 County elections which they feared they would lose. (They went on to do so, down from over 40/60 members to 7.) They wanted to turn Devon & Torbay into a single mega-unitary, even though this had explicit dissent from Torbay, which would give cover to their cancelling democracy. 4. This outrageous attempt to rob the people of Devon of the right to vote and to earn themselves a further year,
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			<p>perhaps two, of unelected power was denied them by the government. The legacy problem they had thus created is that they had not worked up any credible proposal from Devon CC for the end of March.</p> <p>5. For the calendar year of 2024, East Devon held the chair of the Devon Districts' Forum. I was able to have many discussions which made a number of risk factors in devising a response from EDDC obvious to me. i) The likely attempt, soon proven, that the Conservatives at DCC would attempt to cancel elections ii) on the basis of conversations and common understanding, that Labour Exeter were likely to come up with a Unitary plan which would hugely disadvantage the people of both East Devon and wider Devon, and that they had the ear of the Labour government iii) that Conservative Torbay's wish was always primarily to stay as a Unitary. This was a febrile set of circumstances in which politically the two traditional parties of power were likely to favour self-interest.</p> <p>6. This was unacceptable. The chair of the DDF passed to West Devon in January 2025, and I was happy to work with Districts' Leaders and CEOs in the context of the above to devise a plan based not on self-interest but in the public interest. The idea emerged of a) respecting Plymouth's current status b) of 4 councils combining into a new unitary, being South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and</p>
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		<p>West Devon c) of 5 councils combining into a second new unitary, being East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon and Torridge</p> <p>7. This was devised in good faith, meeting the population numbers seemingly required and having many other strengths. The obvious concern in the 4:5:1 was that Torbay were not very committed to the 4 (ultimately, they did not support it) and that Exeter were wholly uncommitted to the 5 (ultimately, they too did not support the 4:5:1)</p> <p>8. In April 2025, the government responded to the various draft submissions, stating that they required full and final ideas by the end of November 2025</p> <p>9. In May 2025, County elections were held. The Conservatives lost control (now 7/60) and Reform are 16/60 with no prospect of an administration. In a scenario very nearly mirroring the Democratic Alliance at East Devon, the Liberal Democrats took control of County with NOC but with good relations with the Greens and Independents.</p> <p>10. Given my own experience in LGR matters in Devon and as a leader for half a decade, the County Leader asked me to step into the void of the LGR PH at County. This provided me with no conflict of interest, although of course care must be taken. It was known that EDDC would continue to develop the Council instruction to explore 4:5:1.</p>
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			<p>continued to favour 4:5:1. Meanwhile, the County, itself using sound internal and external advice, favoured 9:1:1. The most fundamental difference in opinions was around interpretation of shared data re social services. There is nothing wrong with such a difference of view which may have arisen from each idea engaging with the data stressing alternative fundamentals. There is nothing awry in this, and it has been common in LGR across England.</p> <p>15. We then entered the period where submission decisions would need to be made across all Devon authorities. Cllr Goodman errs when he said I “proposed” the idea of 9:1:1 from the County perspective. That was the Leader seconded by another member of Cabinet. I abstained at both councils. I was content to explain the idea of 9:1:1, however, and the people of East Devon and Devon had every right to hear and consider its merits and demerits. Anyone paying attention would have seen my repeated public statements that ONLY 4:5:1 and 9:1:1 observed the key exam question which was that any proposal was required to consider and offer proof that it could work for ALL the authority areas across Devon. I spoke in praise of both proposals only last Friday at DCC Full Council, and have done so consistently including in meetings with DALC and others.</p> <p>16. To answer Cllr Goodman’s question. Despite his attempts to personalise this in council and in</p>
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			<p>the press, I am proud that the two councils I have been elected to have acted impeccably in the last six months to devise proposals which consider the common good of all Devonians, and that we have done so in a situation where both the Conservatives and Labour have pursued “I’m alright, Jack” policies and proposals.</p> <p>17. As he knows, the Secretary of State will now consider which proposals will go to stakeholder consultation in the new year. In my view, it is to be hoped that the SoS has the independence of mind to include both 4:5:1 and 9:1:1 as options. I am pleased that both have been put forward.</p>
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