

WDBC Councillors Report - January 2025

Cllr Holly Greenberry-Pullen, Tavistock North.

Overview and Scrutiny (ONS).

The ONS welcomed South West Water (SWW) who presented their development plan for the next five years. Funding for bathing waters was stated as being prioritised to ensure the River Dart continues to meet bathing water status. This will reduce investment for West Devon. There were stated to be no discharges issues in West Devon due to improvements and upgrades; although during the meeting I examined live data from the River Trust which uses SWW live data to find that there was a live active discharge at Mary Tavy. They said they were aware of this! SWW stated they had no shellfish waters within the borough so nothing to share; however, when asked about the shellfish in the Tamar and why this wasn't mentioned, they stated that this wasn't within their designated area to monitor, neither was the River Walkham which isn't designated as a bathing water. This raised concerns and statements in the chamber especially about our children swimming in our local rivers and where designated areas lie. The speakers explained that the Environment Agency and OFWAT define SWW's areas of monitoring. There was strong discussion about responsibility, and it was stated that we have 20,000 km (about 12427.42 miles) of underground sewerage networks. A discussion about their age and integrity was raised, it is known that many are old and may well be leaching sewerage into our subterranean environment, SWW commented that they had 12,000 sewerage monitors in the region, but it was impossible to replace all pipe work and monitor all sewers. They acknowledged there may well be undetected leaks but that they could also use CCTV to examine the sewers too. They stated that there would be increases in bills in the future to cover the cost of future upgrade works, this was then debated - questioning if it was the water users responsibility to pay or the share holders responsibility to agree to works from SWW profits. Other matters were raised also. It was informative and there will be more information from SWW to follow regarding their investment into the area.

West Devon CVS.

A new CEO is in the process of being appointed as Karen Nolan the current CEO of CVS will be stepping down in the near future. Karen and Hannah Child were discussing the organisation's challenges.

The key challenges as presented were, changes of need within the sector, increasing demands from service users, the recruitment of trustees and the recruitment of a new CEO, as well as long term funding for support services.

To meet these challenges, they are going to be running a trustee recruitment campaign and looking to place a new CEO. They will undertake a value for money review, and a five-year plan review. They are looking at focusing to increase partnership work and also the funding of core projects.

Temporary Accommodation

Spring Hill and Plymouth Road accommodation will, all being well, be completed in days by the end of January or early February. The accommodation is to be used for families. The delay at Spring Hill was due to an adjoining roofing issue and some leakage. We have 23 households in temporary accommodation which equates to 6 families and 17 single people. There is a high need nationally for one bed homes.

Highways and Potholes

Numerous Cllrs including myself will be working together to continue highlighting our growing concern to the Highways Department including 'Iron Railings' on the Brentor Road which will be focused on as needing urgent review and safety measures installing as it has sadly become a fatality accident hot spot. I have been engaged with the local community on this issue for a few months now. Other areas of concern have been raised looking at virtual footpaths which are no longer maintained by highways and causing issues for pedestrians; problems with repairing potholes and what is reported as inadequate repair is being questioned too. Importantly likely accident hot spots due to the fading out of white lines on our highways have also been raised as a concern. DCC has not responded to the concerns raised in council about Iron Railings Junction and which has been presented to Devon Highways. It is agreed that this 'silence' isn't acceptable as this area is as aforementioned a very serious fatality hot spot and must be improved for all our road users including many locals.

Budget

The council will be looking to set a balanced budget. Council tax will not exceed the maximum increase of 2.99%, the actual increase has not been decided yet. If an increase of 2.99 % was to be set it would increase payments by just over £7 maximum a year based on a band D property. Council Tax Has been modelled at 2.5% and 2.99%.

Devolution

All eight district council leaders agreed they did not want a Devon wide unitary authority. The governments approach to this is strongly disagreed too. As a council we and the other seven councils are strongly opposed to postponing the County Council elections in MAY 2025 - which Devon County Council has suggested should be the case. Cancelled elections are forecast to only occur within first phase priority areas; which we do not expect to be listed as.

No regional Devon wide agreement between councils was made over proposing new boundary changes. It is felt that neither Devon as a whole, or as part of the broader southwest peninsular authority will work as one unitary authority; there is little evidence that merging rural authorities will result in financial savings, as many unitary councils are in debt or suffering financial difficulties. We have collectively stated that a merger of local councils without consultation will reduce democratic representation and remove decision making away from local people. We fear this would lead to less support for local people. It was welcomed that devolving power to regions and local communities was a good concept, but rural areas, and areas combining suburban and urban areas with rural and coastal areas need to be understood more thoroughly, it is also agreed that residents and elected representatives should feed into a consultation on devolution. It is thought that Devon will not be in the first phase of the reforms of change and any change that does occur may take far longer than some anticipate. Possibly many years. We will see as matters progress.

SEND

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is a problem across the whole of Devon and beyond including within Tavistock. This has been raised numerous times and highlights the urgent need for appropriate support for those families with children and young people in need. This problem will require funding for our CYP and support where viable despite it being a DCC mandate. Concerns about this have been raised.

THANK YOU TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL FOR RECEIVING MY FIRST REPORT TO YOU. I'D BE HAPPY TO NOTE ANY QUESTIONS AND GET BACK TO YOU. IT WILL BE A PLEASURE ENGAGING AND GETTING TO KNOW THOSE OF YOU WHO I HAVEN'T MET YET. HGP