

Devon County Councillor January 2024 update for Gulworthy and Tavistock Parish Councils

Dear Councillors,

Please find a brief update about the latest figures relating to the 2024 Budget.

The business that is Devon County Council has a turnover of round £1.8Bn for 2024/25, of which £743.38m is the Council nett revenue budget, the rest ring fenced for education. The headlines figures in the table below include the two largest Directorates i.e. Adults and Children's Services (IASC & C & YPF) who it is proposed will get increased investment i.e. funding of 6% and 10.4% respectively, which would account for just over 79% of the nett budget. Much of this is due to services we must legally provide, as against discretionary ones.

For 2024/25 Locality Budgets members will be able to carry forward any unspent money from 2023/24 and will each have £8k to spend in their communities for 2024/25.

- A significant amount of work has been undertaken across directorates and by finance officers to present a set of targets that are affordable next year.
- This builds on the Financial Sustainability Programme undertaken last year and takes forward the Sustainable and Stronger Council strategies that we as Cabinet approved last September. This is vital in ensuring the Authority remains financially sustainable.
- Overall, it is proposed that service targets are increased by some £43.8m – 6.3% – to a total of £743.38m.
- The report summarises that the targets allow for estimated inflationary costs of £48.5m. This includes around £25.7m as the potential costs of the increase in the National Living Wage and a further £22.8m to cover estimated inflationary costs for staffing and contracted services.
- A further £44.9m is added to budget targets for the costs of demand and other service pressures and priorities.
- Clearly its vital that targets are affordable, and that we can balance the budget and live within our means. To achieve this, it is necessary to include targets for savings, additional income, and using alternative sources of funding totalling £49.6m to mitigate identified cost pressures that aren't covered by increases in grant funding.
- The report also sets out in section 5 the latest available funding information that is reflected in the draft budget following the announcement of the Provisional Finance Settlement just before Christmas. This includes a number of lines of funding including grants and local taxation raised through council tax and business rates and reflects the Government's calculation of our "Core Spending Power" increasing by 6.5%. The Final Settlement and final estimates for council tax and business rates funding are expected in early February and will therefore be reflected in the proposed budget next month.
- In conclusion, like all of local government, managing our financial position continues to be a challenging balancing act, which might be viewed as something of an understatement when faced with the after effects of Covid still with us, conflict in various places across the globe leading to a cost-of-living crisis.

Tavistock Town Council has received information about highways, so I will not duplicate here.

- SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) DCC plan to turn around the service and pay off the deficit have been submitted to the DfE.
Our SEND Department is not being run by Kelly Knott who has been seconded from the Department for Education.
- Devolution is being signed off by the Government soon.
- On-Street Car Parking charging proposals.
Following the consultation, the results will be considered by the DCC Cabinet.
- Road works.

The road works, please read a letter which I have submitted to the press
"I'd like to respond to issues being raised with me about road works currently taking place in Tavistock over which I have been in touch with officers at the County Council.

Utility companies make permit applications to undertake highway works and their activities are divided into two types, pre-planned works and reactive or unplanned works. All permit applications are assessed to identify any direct clashes between works. Utilities have legal rights to lay, maintain and remove their apparatus which does influence how the activity is managed. Ultimately, road works is a necessary activity and is frequently time and/or location sensitive.

In the case of unplanned works, utilities may access the network immediately to repair faults and return services or supplies to customers without notifying the County Council in advance however. While advanced notice is necessary for planned activity, coordinating all works can be an uncompromising and hugely challenging task with multiple competing demands to manage planned and unplanned activity.

If planned activity is already occurring in a locality and it is then overlaid with unplanned reactive works, network management challenges result. Towns and villages are not immune from multiple works taking place and the coordination function is to eliminate direct clashes and arrange for promoters to mitigate congestion wherever possible.

Recent activity in Tavistock is a combination of planned and unplanned works. Planned works are being performed by Wales & West Utilities to replace old iron gas mains with safer more sustainable material as part of their regulatory activity. Other planned works include telecommunications and water apparatus repairs along with some unplanned works to deal with leakages.

Information about works activity in any location can be found on line via uk.one.network/tm."

- I have received some hate mail which has been sent to the legal team. No councillor should be subjected to hate mail. We will all be glad when the essential either planned or emergency works are completed in our Ancient Market Town.
- I would like to take this opportunity to thank Gulworthy Parish Council for their pro-active approach to working together and am happy that we are able to work in an inclusive and collaborative way. Thank you.
As ever, if you need to contact me, please email debo.sellis@devon.gov.uk