

Budget 2025/6 - **Devon County Council** is meeting later this week to set the budget for the coming year. The financial position of the council remains extremely difficult. All councils are required to produce a balanced budget each year.

This is being achieved in Devon by taking funds from reserves and relying on the extra funds allocated by the Department of Education as part of the Safety Valve Agreement (SVA). The SVA is based on DCC cutting costs on the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) budget and achieving improvements in the service. Currently the required savings have not been made, and the overspend is expected to increase. There is a risk that if DCC is unable to agree a revision to the SVA and funds are reclaimed by government, the financial position of the council will not be sustainable.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution – DCC failed in its attempt to put off May's elections for a year or to be part of the Priority Devolution Programme. Government has asked for an in-principal submission on the future shape of local government in Devon by 21 March 2025, and final detailed plans in the autumn.

Options are being discussed, and data gathered, to support DCC decisions on a future unitary council model. It is expected that DCC's preferred model will be a Super Devon Council, covering most of the current county plus Torbay. District Councils in Devon are also working up plans.

Locality Grant – Eden Park School applied through their local County Councillor to get a grant for equipment that will support children's learning and development through outside activities. This follows previous grants that the County Councillor has been able to give the school, which serves some of the most deprived families in Barnstaple.

This year a grant was also provided to Newport School for their New to Newport project – which brings children and families from overseas together with local families at the schools firepit to share knowledge and understanding of different cultures while developing personal relationships.

The **Devon District Council** leaders have been meeting to consider proposals for local government organisation and have settled on a potential option of:

- Plymouth and part of southern Devon
- South Devon and Torbay
- Northern and West Devon including Exeter

**North Devon Council** is about to set its budget for 2025-26, This year this has been achieved without cuts to services or any reductions in staffing.

Currently, the forecast for 2026-27 is looking more challenging.

The District Council is currently consulting on its housing strategy led by Councillor Graham Bell. The consultation can be found on the District Council website and runs until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

The **District and Town Councils** receive a significant number of complaints about the number of empty shops in the town Centre. In comparison to many other similar towns, Barnstaple is doing very well with a much lower vacancy rate.

Currently there are only two vacant shops being actively marketed in the Town Centre; North Devon Council are trying to identify and approach landlords to better understand why they are leaving their properties empty.

In addition, the Green Lanes Shopping Centre has achieved a £1 million surplus for the district council since it was purchased, this has helped the District Council with discretionary funds and to achieve the balanced budget.

The new hub for council services will be opening soon in Green Lanes.

The evaluation of the public art project, funded through the Arts Council is currently taking place and the public are invited to give their feedback on the applications through the [Barnstaple.co.uk](http://Barnstaple.co.uk) website.

Councillor J Coates responded, saying:

I recently took part in a town centre walkabout with district and town council officers to look at the number of vacant properties within the town centre and improve improvements that can be made within the town centre.

The Town Council has also been part of the evaluation for the Public Art project.

North Devon Council is inviting people to have their say on a new draft Housing Strategy, which sets out a high-level vision and objectives as to how the council plans to try and meet the housing needs and hopes of our communities.

The Housing Strategy will guide the Council's activities in delivering and discharging its housing functions and responsibilities, whilst ensuring that resources and efforts are best directed to tackle the housing challenges that the area faces. It was compiled following the publication of the [Devon Housing Commission](#) Report in July 2024, championed by Lord Best.

The draft Strategy has been prepared in full consultation with a working group of elected Members, who have been involved through a dedicated workshop and feedback sessions. It is built on a foundation of three themes:

**Prevent Homelessness:** Preventing homelessness by supporting citizens to stay in their current home if they have one, but if this isn't possible/or they are already homeless seek to help them find alternative solutions.

**Provide New Housing Supply:** Supply new housing to meet social demand, delivering affordable & sustainable healthy homes wherever possible.

**Make Homes Healthy:** Improving the quality of existing homes making them safe and healthy, in turn making their occupants healthy too.

The Council recognises the value of gaining different perspectives and insights and therefore inviting you to submit your views. The draft strategy is available for wider consultation for a period of seven weeks from **Monday 10 February 2025 to Monday 31 March 2025.**

You can view the draft strategy and find out more by visiting the Council's website at [Let's Talk North Devon](#)

End of Report

Cllr Julie Hunt

Lead Member for Waste & Recycling

I also include my report on Waste & Recycle submitted to full council in January