

Housing – On 15th Feb WDBC agreed a motion to declare a Housing Crisis and identified 15 key points that require action. A report will come the Hub Committee on 8th March. The points in question can be found listed on the agenda: <http://mg.swdevon.lan/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=271&MId=1628&Ver=4> and they recognise the challenges being faced by those looking for somewhere to live – namely that of affordability and availability. House prices in Devon are over 12 times the average salary and there is a serious lack of long term rented accommodation available despite the JLP exceeding housing delivery targets.

Homelessness - WDBC has a Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker who supports vulnerable homeless people who sleep rough, or are in danger of not having a place to stay. If you know of anyone sleeping rough please advise them to contact a member of the Housing Team about accommodation over this period. Please call 01822 813600, Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside of these hours please call 01803 867034 to speak to the Duty Officer.

WDBC is asking for local views on plans to prevent and relieve homelessness. A recent report to the Hub committee highlighted that single and couples households, families, and people with additional needs are all at high risk of homelessness and must be prioritised alongside rough sleepers. The public consultation runs until 23 March 2022 and you can have your say here: www.westdevon.gov.uk/homelessness-strategy-2022.

Council Tax Rebate - WDBC have just received the government guidance relating to the £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate. Those residents in Band A to D that pay by Direct Debit should receive the payment automatically in April. For those residents that do not pay by direct debit or those that wish to apply for the discretionary scheme, WDBC are producing a FAQ insert that will be sent with the Council Tax bill in March which will detail what their options are to receive the payment.

Council Tax - set an increase in Council Tax for 2022/23 of £5 (Band D of £246.63 for 2022/23 – an increase of less than 10 pence per week or £5 per year – equates to a 2.07% increase). The WDBC element of the council tax bill represents 11% of the whole. In the last year, nearly £3.9m has also been paid out to those Borough residents who need help to pay their Council Tax bills through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

For those struggling to pay rent, or who are already in arrears, additional support in Discretionary Housing Payments of an extra £86,635 has been paid, with £61,363 more to be allocated by the end of March. To help with sudden unexpected costs that can create challenges for the Borough's residents who are experiencing financial hardship, the Council has provided £31,000 through the Household Support Fund. This provides rapid short-term financial support to meet immediate needs and helps those who are struggling to afford food, energy and water bills, and other related essentials this winter.

Planning - Developers planning to build new homes or any development in the Joint Local Plan area will be required to incorporate measures that will help owners tackle climate change as soon as they move in. Features such as solar panels, ground or air source heat pumps and electric vehicle charging facilities will be fitted as standard on all new homes and commercial buildings under proposals being put forward in the draft Climate Emergency Planning Policy and Guidance.

Other measures will see more habitat and green space designed into developments, which increases biodiversity and brings health and wellbeing benefits to residents. These measures will also go some way to mitigate against rising global temperatures.

A consultation is being launched shortly to get the views of residents, campaigners and developers across the area about the proposals, which if approved, could come into effect as early as June. Any new measures would apply to new planning applications only.

Cllr Julie Yelland
Okehampton South Ward
Report prepared 25th Feb 2022