

CLlr Lois Samuel - June Report 2023

Please find a little update on some of the services we cover at DCC

Finance

As you know the finance service at DCC provides the fuel that drives the whole 'business' i.e. the money that runs all of the activities we undertake as a council. Like all other tier 1 Councils that fuel is in short supply currently.

Around 80% of DCC money is spent on around 3% of the population, overwhelmingly in Adult and children's services with huge pressures and increase in service demand both during and post the pandemic where we have statutory duties and services to provide, while adequate real term income from Government in recent years that keeps ahead of inflation has been scarce.

It became evident pretty early in to the 2022/23 that urgent actions had to be taken to get a predicted overspend of around £53m under control or we'd be bust by March 31st this year, effectively handing back the keys to central government by way of a section 114 notice. Finance team members were embedded into each of the service areas to find out where the money was going and how we could get that under control.

After a vast amount of cross service work I like to think we have reached the 'end of the beginning' in putting Council finances back on to a long term, sustainable footing. The result is that the 'outturn' or what we spent in 2020/23 will come in at around a £2million underspend, as against the £53million overspend we faced last June; an extraordinary turnaround.

Far from being out of the woods the SEND overspend sits currently off the balance sheet, at the instruction of Government and we continue to negotiate with the DfE on help with reducing/paying off that sum off, as is also the case with other Tier 1 Councils in similar proportionate positions (we are a very large Council when comparing to somewhere like Stoke on Trent who are also in the 'Safety Valve programme).

A key part of our long term sustainability and services being funded proportionally more equally, (not least 'Pothole Central' i.e. DCC Highways) is the Governance Review, vital to DCC working in a truly corporate way. Our 'new' CEO and Senior Leadership Team is getting to grips with what needs to be done, including some pretty tough financial decisions that will impact on service users and will not be pain free.

This includes the replacement to FINEST (run on MS-DOS, which is pre-Windows 95!!) which will 'go live' next spring, offering us real time data and reporting on where and how we use our financial resources and react where/when necessary. This must set the future direction where all significant investments like this must show a real ROI in both monetary and productivity terms.

New Environmental Improvement Plan:

In line with the statutory requirement introduced by the Environment Act, government published its new Environmental Improvement Plan for England on 31st January. This five-year delivery plan sets out the ambitions to restore nature and improve the environmental quality of the air, our waters and our land

It is important to understand the role and content of this plan in the context of the wider statutory requirements of the Environment Act 2021, particularly the following key points:

1. There must be a long-term Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) that sets out the steps that government will take to improve the natural environment. The government had, previously, identified the 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) as the first EIP. This second EIP (EIP23) effectively updates and provides the delivery plan for the 25YEP (although exact relationship between them is now unclear).
2. There must be statutory targets for improvement to the natural environment. This is what the government published on 16/12/22. What EIP23 does is repeat these statutory targets but also adds further (non-statutory) interim targets along with the intended delivery approaches to be taken by government to achieve these.
3. These environmental targets and delivery approaches must be considered alongside the Environmental Principles Policy Statement that applies across government (i.e. these principles being set by statute).
4. It is the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) which is the new oversight body charged with ensuring compliance with these three statutory requirements above.
5. Although not a statutory requirement stemming from the Environment Act, the EIP23 also makes it clear that its content needs to be considered alongside a wide range of other national strategies which include specific policy programmes to drive progress towards the goals set out in 25YEP and EIP23. Examples are: England Trees Action Plan; UK Marine Strategy; The Agricultural Transition Plan etc.

As you may have seen from press reports, one of the headline commitments is that every household should be situated within a 15-minute walk of a green space or water, which is addressed by Natural England's newly launched Green Infrastructure Framework. Other measures include commitments to restore at least 500,000 hectares (1.2m acres) of wildlife habitat, and 400 miles of river. This will include 25 new or expanded national nature reserves and 3,000 hectares (7,400 acres) of new woodland along England's rivers. Sewage spills are also to be tackled, with upgrades to 160 wastewater treatment works by 2027, and a plan – to be set out in detail later in the year – to tackle the increasing pressures on the water system from pollution, new housing developments and the climate crisis. From November every Government department will also have an obligation to consider the environmental and climate impacts of each new policy and piece of legislation.

The full plan can be seen here:

[Environmental Improvement Plan \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Devon (and nationally) Bus Issues.

Background

Up until 31 March 2023 local bus companies and local authorities have continued to receive additional funding from the Department for Transport to support the recovery in bus services since the pandemic. This funding is due to finish at the end of the current financial year.

In Devon, working with our bus companies, this funding has been used to maintain as much of the commercial and supported network as possible. Alongside the £2 fare initiative and improved driver position with Stagecoach locally we are starting to see improvements and, linked with the County Council's continued financial commitment thanks to the on street parking, alongside the improvements we have planned from our National Bus Strategy allocation, we have an excellent opportunity to build back confidence in the network and see more people back on the buses.

Future funding concern

This could all be in jeopardy though. There was some earlier indications that some additional Government funding would continue into the new financial year but the current messaging coming from the DfT feels very different and there is no guarantee that anything will come forward. We are aware that buses are the most popular form of public transport and carry significantly more passengers than railways, but the funding invested into the mode is substantially less and the bus may miss out again.

We are trying to get some feedback about the likely impact nationally as many areas will be seeing significant service reductions. In Devon we hope changes will not be on this scale but there is a possibility of some marginal services being withdrawn with the expectation that the local authority can pick them up when funding is already fully committed and we are seeing significant contract price increases.

This article sums it up:

[LocalGov.co.uk - Your authority on UK local government - Future of bus services 'hangs in the balance'](#)

Highways

The Service is working very hard to address the current backlog of safety defects that remain across the network. The winter season has been a real challenge with an extended period of sub-zero temperatures from late November through to the wettest March for over 40 years. The fragile nature of the asset resulted in reports from the public regularly in excess of 400 per day.

Our Term Maintenance Contractor has continued to deploy additional resources to pothole repairs and is focused on the safety of the travelling public. The impact of these additional resources to catch up the backlog is that a number of you will see that works planned for your areas, particularly patching will have been reprogrammed for later in the financial year.

The additional funding announced in the Chancellor's budget is very welcome and will go some way to countering the inflationary impacts of the last couple of years, particularly felt since the war in Ukraine. Details of how the £9.4m of funding is allocated was shared in the Capital report taken to Cabinet in April but I can assure you that all of the monies are being invested into the carriageway with the majority going into the Local Area Capital Programme that we are consulted on by our Neighbourhood Officer.

The next round of 20mph speed limits is moving forward. Each of the recent submissions was considered alongside the first round and reviewed against the criteria agreed by cabinet. The schemes that will be taken forward are

Dolton
Dawlish (Cockwood)
Uffculme
Dawlish (Central)
Black Torrington
Bridgerule
Ottery St Mary

I appreciate that many of our rural roads needs attention, but please can I continue to encourage you to keep logging on the DCC website the issues you come across, or please do email me directly.

Integrated Adult Social Care Vision and Strategies

- At the June Cabinet Cllr James Mcinnes will be bringing our [vision and strategies documents](#) to seek formal adoption after undertaking a public consultation asking for views. Promoting Independence remains at the heart of our vision, and this is woven through our three strategies, Living Well, Aging Well, and Caring Well. We have also circulated the draft vision and strategies widely, including at the Health and Wellbeing Board, Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee, with our partner organisations, and of course IASC staff. Pending ratification, the documents will be available as webpages on the DCC website.

Impact of the NHS Devon Cost of Living Fund Community Fund

- At the Integrated Care Partnership meeting on the 1 June, we received an update on the delivery and impact of the NHS Devon Cost of Living Community Fund, a £300,000 pot of money from NHSE to the Devon ICS. The fund was delivered locally by 11 key VCSE infrastructure organisations, and was open to all VCSE organisations delivering projects that address the cost of living crisis.
- 133 application where submitted across the ICS area totalling more than £550,000. Of those 133 applications, 97 were successful with 121 separate projects supported, and so far 5130 people feeling the direct benefit of them. Here's a flavour of the organisations and the projects supported:
 - Totnes Caring - Offered subsidised lunches with transport for 45 older people
 - East The Water Food Pantry – Directly served 100 local residents per week who suffer from food insecurity within the community
 - Re-Rooted - Extending warm space / meal provision for 100 immigrant families
 - The Hub South Brent - Purchased and distributed low energy electric blankets supporting 18 households
 - Empowering Families With Disabled Children - Free resources to assist 50 families in identifying possible extra funding (grants for Equipment, Essential items, Educational aids, Day trips or short breaks) to help with the extra costs associated with having a disabled child

Respect Exeter Festival

- The [Exeter Respect Festival](#) is taking place the weekend of the 10 and 11 June in Belmont Park. Staff across Integrated Adult Social Care will be attending and

volunteering across the two days, talking to people about the changes we've achieved regarding diversity and equality.

Shared Lives South West recruiting Shared Lives Carer

- Shared Lives South West (SLSW) is a charity that recruits and trains Shared Lives Carers who use their family home to support people with learning disabilities, autism, dementia or challenges related to mental health or older age. This type of care is called 'Shared Lives'; a person-centred, community based and affordable alternative to supported living or residential care. Shared Lives is safe, sustainable, promotes independence and allows people to live their life how they want to. SLSW has been providing Shared Lives for almost 20 years and is rated 'Outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission, and is the only provider in Devon, Cornwall Plymouth, Torbay and Somerset, with a network of 280 Shared Lives Carers supporting more than 450 people. Find out more at: www.sharedlivessw.org.uk
- SLSW is recruiting carers across Devon, so please share this message in your communities or consider whether you could be a Shared Lives Carer. Being a Shared Lives Carer is like fostering but for adults, where you could help someone with care and support needs in your own home, and receive an income by helping people to gain the skills and confidence they need to live the most independent lives they can.

If you would like me to come along to any events you are holding then do get in touch, as I would like to get involved if I can.

Best wishes

Cllr Lois Samuel