

March Report for Okehampton Rural

Councillors recently agreed a budget that will see significant increases in spending on services that support vulnerable children, young people and adults, in response to rising demand for those services.

We'll be spending 18.5 per cent more on children's services, and 8.8 per cent more on adult social care services. Overall, we're budgeting to spend 10.5 per cent more on services than we did last year, plus more on infrastructure such as schools and roads.

But, to help pay for it, the average Band D householder will see our proportion of their council tax bill increase by £1.49 a week.

The fact is though, the council tax rise, plus funding we receive from the Government, will not balance our budget book. Spending this much on priority services to meet growing demand means having to make savings in the region of £47.5 million from elsewhere in order to balance the books. We need to make the most of every pound we spend.

Most of those savings are earmarked to come from adult social care, and last week we launched consultations, putting forward proposals on ways that we could make savings in some specific services. We're contacting the people who used those services, directly, to ask them what they think

We have published [three high-level draft proposals](#) for how we plan to support older people, unpaid carers, and adults of working age in future, and we are inviting Devon residents to tell us what they think.



We publish a strategy every few years setting out what we believe our vision should be in meeting people's social care needs.

Our last strategy, 'Promoting Independence in Devon', was published five years ago, prior to the coronavirus pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis.

"Much has changed in the last few years," says Councillor James McInnes. "We need to re-evaluate and refresh our strategies to make sure they're fit for today's Devon and that they meet the demands of residents today."

The three draft strategies include:

- Living Well In Devon, focusing on social care for people aged 18 to 64
- Ageing Well in Devon, focusing on people aged 65 and over

- Caring Well in Devon, focusing on the care and support available for unpaid carers – people who voluntarily care for family members and friends

Consultation closes on Sunday 19 March 2023. [For more information, visit our Have Your Say website.](#)

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'](#)

News on Highways

This winter has posed challenges for the Highways and Traffic Management Service. The mix of prolonged sub-zero temperatures and heavy rain led to a rapid deterioration in the condition of the network highlighting the fragility of the asset following decades of under investment. Since April 2022 our inspection team have assessed over 27,000 reports of potholes from members of the public. Over 10,000 reports were assessed in January alone, we were receiving as many as 500 reports per day. The team have been working hard to get on top of the backlog with a focus on the safety of the travelling public. Milestone, our term maintenance contractor, has increased their resources which has seen weekend working and over forty gangs working across the county. At the beginning of the month there was 3,000 potholes waiting to be repaired, this has reduced to approximately 2,000.

Following a quiet November, in which we saw very little in the way of gritting treatment, the extended cold snaps in December and January has seen us use over 15,000 tonnes of salt across 2,094 runs (the equivalent to 55 full, Countywide treatments on our Primary Salting Network). The average across the last four winters for the same period has been 8,919 tonnes and 1,597 runs.

The resolution of drainage assets referred for additional maintenance has slowed in the last few months to support the corporate financial challenge. However, over 10,000 defects have been addressed so far this financial year which clearly demonstrates the benefits of funding a focused programme of drainage asset defect identification.

We still have over 14,000 outstanding drainage asset defects across the county and works are continuing to resolve them.

The Customer Transformation project has passed a key milestone with the go live of the first service; vehicle crossings on the 31 January 2023. The revised online application form feeds into a new back-office case management system (CMS). This will allow those who manage the applications to start moving away from mailbox management which will improve efficiency, provide better overview of demand into the service and our help keep customer's data secure.

The second service; scaffolding, will go live at the end of February. Alongside this, design work has started focussing on adding functionality to the CMS, by doing so the system will evolve into a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This will enable teams to move away completely from mailboxes and manage applications, including internal and external communications, within one system.

The Traffic Team are reviewing the requests for new 20mph speed limits. To help determine which schemes are prioritised and to ensure consistency they will consider the new requests by applying the same scoring matrix agreed at Cabinet. In addition to the speed limit requests the team are building an evidence base to support community consultation on the roll out of pay and display restrictions.

The new Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan is nearing completion. This document is important as it sets the future approach to the maintenance standards and strategies the County adopts. Officers are planning to bring it to Cabinet in April for Member comments.

If you need to contact me for any issues within your parish, then please do not hesitate to contact me either by email or on my mobile.

Best wishes

Cllr Lois Samuel
Okehamton Rural DCC
07976 780635