

County Councillor report

Libraries:

We were really pleased to successfully receive grant funding from central government to support modernisation of many of our libraries. The £200k from central government was match funded with £100k from DCC and £100k from Libraries Unlimited

[Funding awarded to upgrade technology in Devon's Libraries - News](#)

The results of the extensive library consultation are currently being considered and a report is going to cabinet 20th May (tomorrow!) where decisions will be made on the future of the service. My personal preference is that we should invest significantly more into the library service, with a transformation programme, working together with town councils and local communities to integrate more services into library spaces, grow the volunteer base, modernise the service and make them more resilient into the future. [Bid to protect Devon libraries with £1m boost - News](#)

[Devon's library opening hours could be protected as community rallies to save service - Latest From ITV News](#)

Train 4 Tomorrow:

More funding has been secured to deliver skills bootcamps across Devon. This opens up such fantastic opportunities for people looking to upskill or change career. Please do spread the word. [Extra funding will help more adults access Train4Tomorrow Skills Bootcamps - News](#)

Local councillor grants:

Our locality budget has increased to £10,000 this year which is great news for local communities. Please get in touch if there is a project or organisation which you feel could benefit from some funding. I am also pleased to say the youth grant has reopened with £160,000 available in the form of small grants to support groups and activities for young people aged 11-25

[Almost £400,000 went to community projects, local events and good causes last year - News](#)

[PLACES TO GO THINGS TO DO Grant Fund - for Young People - Communities](#)

[Locality budgets - Democracy in Devon](#)

Visit with North Devon MP to WM Ironwork Ltd, Newton Tracey:

I was pleased to visit WM Ironwork Ltd in Newton Tracey recently, alongside North Devon MP Ian Roome. Founded in 1977, this family-run business has grown from a small local workshop into one of the South West's leading steelwork companies, now employing over 100 people and delivering bespoke projects across the UK.

The company has evolved from its agricultural manufacturing roots—well known locally for products such as the sheep turnover crate—into a diverse operation, with around half of current production focused on balconies for the construction sector.



It was encouraging to hear about their apprenticeship programme, including meeting a female apprentice who is developing skills and working towards a manufacturing qualification. Opportunities like this are vital for young people in our rural communities.

We also discussed challenges facing the business, including rising energy costs, difficulties recruiting skilled staff, and the importance of fast and reliable broadband—an issue I am actively pursuing. Although just outside my division, the business has strong ties to

Torrington Rural, and I was delighted to support and highlight this important local employer

Meeting with Professor Sir Chris Whitty:

It was a real pleasure to welcome Sir Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer, to Devon and to have the opportunity to speak honestly about the realities facing our rural communities.



During his visit, we highlighted some of the biggest challenges affecting people across Devon: the lack of affordable housing for local people, low wages, an ageing population, poor public transport, and the steady decline of local services. We also discussed how increasing digitisation is deepening inequalities, with more services moving online and many people being left behind because they are digitally excluded.

We also spoke about the particular difficulties facing young people in rural areas, including limited transport, fewer opportunities, barriers to training and employment, and the sense of isolation that can come with growing up in dispersed communities.

Sir Chris Whitty was particularly interested in hearing about the farming sector. I spoke about the growing pressures and stresses facing farmers, and the increasing isolation that comes with modern farming systems. Farming is not simply a job, it is a way of life, and for many it continues well into later life. The

shift from traditional, shared labour to increasingly solitary working patterns has had a real impact on wellbeing and connection in rural communities. I also mentioned the importance of Young Farmers Clubs!

It was encouraging to hear Sir Chris speak about the importance of trusted people and trusted spaces in delivering public health services, and we discussed the opportunities for better outreach across dispersed rural populations.

It was fantastic to have Sir Chris visit us here in Devon, and what stood out most was that he was genuinely listening. He recognised that national averages, including the Index of Multiple Deprivation, often fail to reflect the lived reality of rural communities. We discussed how measures in

the IMD such as car ownership, are treated as indicators of relative affluence, when in rural areas a car is not a luxury but a necessity for getting to work, accessing healthcare, reaching schools, and simply managing daily life. He agreed that these averages often miss the reality of rural deprivation and he placed real emphasis on the need for more granular local data to strengthen our case and ensure that rural issues, not only specific to Devon, but for the whole of England, are properly understood in policy making.

A very valuable visit, and an important conversation for Devon.

[Chief Medical Officer, Sir Chris Whitty, explores the health challenges in rural Devon - News](#)

Great Torrington Mayfair:

I was honoured to take part in the Mayfair celebrations in Great Torrington this year, and was even more honoured to be invited by the Mayor to speak as part of the formal proclamation ceremony. The weather was glorious for the whole morning, including the crowning of the May Queen, and the children were absolutely wonderful.

I think we all loved this year's theme: Galileo- Sun, Moon and Stars. They all shone so brightly in the sunshine! Huge thanks to every single person who worked so hard to make it happen.



District Councillor Report – Cllr Wheatley – May 2026

Crisis and Resilience Fund

Pleased to announce a new government funded scheme called The Crisis and Resilience Fund is now available and has replaced the Household Support Fund 7. The Crisis Resilience Fund is £453,055 and for Heating Oil, £121,463. More details about the Scheme including eligibility and getting help now is available on the Torridge District Council Website. The Crisis and Resilience Fund is designed to help low-income households experiencing a sudden financial crisis or loss of income. **Also included is helping you with Heating Oil for low-income households, Food, Energy, Essentials, Appliances**

and Housing. Like the previous Household Support Scheme, Encompass are partners of TDC (Torridge District Council).

To apply to the **FUND: For HELP ONLINE:** www.torridge.gov.uk/crisisandresiliencefund **OR**

You can telephone Encompass Southwest on 01271 371 499

No 4 THE SQUARE

I received an update from Olly Kearney regarding No 4 The Square. Olly was unable to gain access to the property as the owner did not show up to be let in though he did collect some photos of the state of the property and spoke to several neighbours and residents including both number 3 and 5 The Square and the Local Parish Chairman. Olly will advise me further once next steps have been agreed with Phil Gilbert regarding this case.

Southwest Water Councillor Briefing Session

I attended a recent councillor briefing session presented by Alan Burrows, Head of Local Government Affairs Pennon Group who own Southwest Water regarding their priorities and new business plan -

4 Top Priorities -

- 1 -Water Quality and resilience
- 2- Storm overflows and pollution
- 3- Net Zero and environmental gains
- 4- Delivering for customers and affordability

Priority 2 - To transform their sewer network by 2040 starting with all sites which affect our most loved places. This needs to happen now not 2040!

North Devon Biosphere - Taw and Torridge Water Quality Project

Recently I attended the North Devon Biosphere Project Meeting with Rob Jordan - CEO at North Devon Biosphere providing an enlightening presentation.

Rob presented the latest developments on building a smart Biosphere covering water quality data, flood data, biodiversity, soil, Carbon emissions, energy use, land-use, visitor, grid connections. The Biosphere is working on new Data Platform hopefully going live in 2 months' time. It will operate as a dashboard, and I have seen the latest prototype though more work is needed!

We hope to see rankings of the water quality of the 92 River bodies as 1 per dashboard. Expanding the network of river champions and citizen science. Provide analysis to get each river waterbody to a good ecological status.

Integrating other data on each dashboard to include Land use data, urban, farmland, woodland, highway, water company data- storm water overflows duration (Treatment Works), septic tanks data, highways data, others including risk data landfill, mines and quarries, industrial discharges, and others. The catchment for the River Torridge in which Shebbear and Langtree is part of will be most beneficial information to have once the dashboards become available.

The Biosphere is also working with South Westwater, dairy industry, woodland owners the EA (Environmental Agency) and planning authorities, West Country Rivers Trust, Taw, and Torridge River Champions, National and Devon Wildlife Trusts, Devon County Council, North Devon Council, Torridge District Council.

Other projects include the smart Biosphere approach to key bathing areas with monitoring in Croyde and Westward Ho integrating the Environment Agencies weekly monitoring data (May- September).

External Overview and Scrutiny Committee

We recently received a proposal from Robert Blake National Director and Network Director for Rail Future Ltd regarding the potential of a new Bideford to Exeter via Barnstaple and beyond Railway service. Of course, this is very much at its infancy stage, and Councillors and some members of the public raised potential red flag concerns and issues that would need to be considered.

Bideford to Barnstaple:

The Tarka Trail widening and access needed

Huge cost! £300 Million plus as an approx. estimate

Instow sea wall

South Westwater sewage pipes.

Tarka trail rerouting to use underpasses and over bridges and being moved away from existing scenic route.

Bideford station car parking and potential huge congestion with traffic issues.

Bideford Station Short platform and an important heritage area

Near to a site of scientific interest.

Brunswick Wharf development- parking and congestion

Noise and Traffic

Stagecoach

FULL COUNCIL

Play Zones -Using Extra Funding (£38,000) for shortfall projects was discussed and pleased to say adopted by Council for Holsworthy (Stanhope Park) and Great Torrington (derelict tennis courts). Pollyfield was withdrawn due to concerns over viability and local opposition.

PlotBox PRO was proposed and adopted by Council which provides a modern cloud-based cemetery management system.

PlotBox provides a modern digital system with digital maps and online portals for staff, funeral directors, cemeteries, crematoria, memorial masons, funeral homes and public.