

**Inwardleigh Parish Council**  
**George Dexter: July 2024 Report**

**Productivity Plan**

The Government is reviewing productivity across all public services. As part of the recent Local Government Finance Settlement, all Councils are being asked to produce productivity plans. The plans are supposed to help the Government to understand what is already working well across the whole country, what the common themes are and whether there are any gaps and what more the Government needs to do to unlock future opportunities.

In response to this, the Hub Committee recommended a response which highlighted that the recent Peer Review found that WDBC was a well-managed council which delivers consistently well on behalf of its residents and communities. Moreover, within its response, the council commented on a number of areas where the Government could improve its own productivity. Specifically:

- Removal of prescriptive regulation which specifies input measures and operational processes which stifle innovation and better outcomes;
- Incentivising investment in new green infrastructure and affordable housing by introducing discounted borrowing rates;
- Providing a multi-year financial settlement to enable greater ability for longer-term planning by local authorities; and
- Ringfencing second homes council tax premium for local affordable homes.

**Cost of Living Crisis**

In the Spring Budget, the Chancellor announced that the Household Support Fund would be extended for a further 6 months, from 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 with a further £421m of funding. Devon County Council has been provided with funding of £5m by the Department for Work and Pensions for a Household Support Fund (1 April to 30 September 2024). Devon County Council has provided West Devon with £125,045 (based on the Universal Credit uptake in the Borough) from this fund.

WDBC has then resolved to:

- a) progress support payments of £500 to Devon County Council Care Leavers known to be living at an address in the Borough on 1 June 2024;
- b) progress support payments of £500 to Devon Care Leavers newly notified by Devon County Council to be living at an address in the Borough between 2 June and 30 September 2024; and
- c) release the balance of the Household Support Fund for an open application process until 30 September 2024 or until the fund is fully spent, if sooner.

The expectation is that the Household Support Fund will be used to support households in the most need. Further, there is the intention to create a new post of Cost Of Living Support Officer (shared with South Hams District Council) to provide financial support, advice and signposting to residents.

**Unpaid carers cost of living support**

Dartmoor Primary Care Network, through Wellmoor, is providing support for carers in the form of vouchers, payment of utility bills, fuel vouchers or household items. The support is flexible and straightforward to access by emailing [dmin@wellmoor.org.uk](mailto:dmin@wellmoor.org.uk) or telephone 01647 478378

**Housing Profiles**

WDBC will be trialling an alternative to traditional housing needs surveys, in order to gain a greater understanding of the demographics within each community. Unfortunately, survey completion rates are normally low, which makes them flawed. It is important to collate evidence in relation to housing that can be used to inform decisions and support the mix, size, tenure of any future development, whilst also understanding the local needs. The intention is to use these profiles to support the

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responses by the Council in relation to affordable housing as a statutory consultee. Also to share them with our RP partners to support the need for development when seeking approval for funding bids through Homes England and through internal Boards. It will also support development on exception sites that may be brought forward through the West Devon Housing Offer.

The information on the profiles will come from publicly available sources to provide information including:

- property prices and availability
- housing by number of bedrooms
- home ownership
- affordable housing stock
- renting data
- Devon Home Choice
- Schools
- Developments
- Census data

The profiles will be trialled, and comments will be welcomed from councils and members.

**WDBC 2023/24 Accounts**

The council has now completed its annual accounts ready for audit. It has reported a surplus of £149k, which is a good performance in difficult times.

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**West Devon Police Matters**

The police are holding regular on-line and face to face meetings with 'Councillor Advocates'. At the last Teams meeting with Inspector Jones, we discussed the four policing priorities for West Devon:

- Anti-Social Behaviour;
- Drugs;
- Speeding; and
- Rural Crime.

On anti-social behaviour, we noted that the new public order had now been introduced in Okehampton and Tavistock. We agreed that the police should maintain statistics to enable them to assess the effectiveness of this order.

We also discussed speeding. The police now have their own speed gun but need to know where to use it for most effect. It was agreed that we should publicise this so that individuals can report where speeding is happening. The police have provided this link

<https://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/tua/tell-us-about/soh/seen-or-heard/>

so that they can follow up concerns. (The link is a general one and Inspector Jones has already been asked to implement a specific link for this).

**Planning Infrastructure Bill**

All members of the WDBC were given a presentation on the Planning Infrastructure Bill., which will bring in changes in 5 main areas of planning headlined below.

- i) Reduction in the ability to have legal challenges to planning applications. This is intended to apply to major applications, and so speed up the whole process'
- ii) Changes to planning departments to increase the resources available to process applications. There will also be a national scheme of delegation to officers, which will reduce reliance of planning committees. Planning fees will increase to cover costs.
- iii) Strategic Planning will be restored with Spatial Development Strategies.
- iv) Development Corporations will be reintroduced
- v) Environmental Delivery Plans will be strengthened.

**Developing a new Planning Strategy for West Devon**

A process and structure for the development of a new local plan covering West Devon has been approved by WDBC Hub Committee.

We are currently covered by the Plymouth, South Hams and West Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP) which provides the strategic framework for planning decisions. The JLP is 5 years old and is out of date. Further, in December 2024 a new national Planning Policy Framework was introduced. As previously reported, this means a significant increase in the target for the number of houses which will have to be built in west Devon each year.

The new, increased housing numbers from government have resulted in the council losing the protection of a 5-year housing land supply and left the council vulnerable to speculative development proposals. A new local plan will allow the council to positively plan to meet the identified needs of our communities in an appropriate and proportionate manner, creating a positive framework to respond to our known housing, climate and economic challenges and opportunities. Using the government's own accepted processes, the new local plan will identify a local housing requirement that reflects the sensitivities and constraints of our area. A new local plan offers the

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opportunity to review the affordable housing thresholds that are secured as part of new developments and consider innovative approaches to planning policy that deliver more appropriate responses to our housing crisis declaration.

The best and most effective response to the imposition of housing numbers, and the loss of our 5-year housing supply position, is to proactively draft and adopt a new local plan with a new housing requirement figure that is appropriate and proportionate to our area and reflects our local housing, climate and economic needs

Our local plan development process will be:

| <b>Stages of the Process</b>              | <b>Dates</b>               |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Scoping                                   | September 25 to January 26 |
| Plan visioning and strategy development   | February 26 to July 26     |
| Evidence gathering and drafting the plan  | August 26 to May 27        |
| Engagement, proposing changes, submission | June 27 to December 27     |
| Examination                               | January 28 to June 28      |
| Finalisation and adoption of digital plan | July 28                    |

#### Governance arrangements

The process will be controlled overall by a Local Plan Board comprising the Leader of the Council, the Planning portfolio holder and the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee. The detailed work will be carried out by a member working group, chaired by the Chair of the Development Management Committee, working closely with council officers.

#### Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)

The LCWIP was adopted by WDBC Hub Committee in June. The next steps are to share the prioritised interventions on the routes, to identify locally supported projects and remove any that are politically contentious or unrealistic in terms of what DCC would accept.

Highway infrastructure costs are generally very high, and there is only a small amount of active travel funding available to progress a further one or two smaller scale intervention projects. The delivery of other active travel infrastructure projects will only follow when further funding is secured, e.g. by S106 when the LCWIP is embedded within a revised Local Plan.

The full plan can be viewed here. <https://www.westdevon.gov.uk/communities/local-cycling-and-walking-infrastructure-plan-lcwip>.

The LCWIP identifies two 'Quick Wins' for Okehampton (and a number of longer term projects).

#### Local Government Reorganisation

As requested by Government, WDBC along with the other councils are continuing the work to develop proposals for local government reorganisation in Devon. As part of this WDBC has launched a period of engagement with our communities. This will comprise:-

- An online Frequently Asked Questions page; and

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- An online survey seeking residents, business and voluntary sector organisations views on what is important to them. Paper versions of the survey will be available on request if a resident isn't able to participate online.

WDBC also held briefing for Town and Parish councillors on Local Government Reorganisation on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2025.

Community engagement plans will be further developed as proposals for Devon become clearer.

### **Household Support Grants**

Devon County Council (DCC) has been provided with funding of £8.93m by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and, as for previous schemes, they intend to cascade a proportion of this funding to Devon districts for distribution to households in need. The funding is intended to help vulnerable households in the most need with the cost of essentials such as food, energy and water, wider essentials, and in limited circumstances where housing support does not meet need, housing costs and preventative support.

The decision about how the new fund will be distributed was made by the new Devon County Council administration at their Cabinet meeting which took place on 25 June 2025. Following the pattern of previous Household Support Fund schemes, Devon County Council has provided districts with allocations based on Universal Credit uptake. For West Devon this is £196,076.00, which includes £21,008.12 for administration costs.

Cost of living support 24/25

Due to the short-term duration of this scheme, the Council again delivered support through a mixture of direct payments and an open application process. The table below provides a summary of the type of support provided and the number of households helped

| <b>Type of support provided</b>       | <b>Number of households helped</b> | <b>Spend</b>    |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Food                                  | 38                                 | £9,850          |
| Energy and Water                      | 115                                | £34,270         |
| Essentials linked to energy and water | 19                                 | £5,350          |
| Wider essentials                      | 475                                | £115,390        |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>647</b>                         | <b>£164,860</b> |

The Council provided support to residents and households during the 2024/25 financial year in many ways. These included:

- Extra support for housing costs through Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) of £127,233 which helped 170 residents with on-going rental costs or provided help to move to alternative accommodation.
- Making 59 Exceptional Hardship Fund awards totalling £15,366 to provide residents already receiving Council Tax Reduction (Support) additional help with paying their Council Tax.
- Delivering a take up campaign for Pension Credit with a further 56 eligible pensioners now receiving this important benefit which provides a 'passport' to other financial support.

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With many households already on low incomes, reliance on discretionary financial assistance has continued to see significant demand. For some households this support has become an important lifeline to help them meet basic living costs or receive financial help in an emergency.

**2024/25 Accounts**

An underspend (surplus) of £502,000 was generated in 2024/25 through effective budget management, over achievement of income targets and efficient management of costs. This has enabled the Council to approve allocating a further £400,000 for reinvestment into the next year's Council Plan. This funding has been put into the Council Plan earmarked reserve leaving an underspend (surplus) of £102,000 for the 2024/25 financial year. This equates to 1.1% of the 2024/25 net budget of £9.488 million

In accordance with normal accounting practice, this surplus of £102,000 has gone into Unearmarked Reserves in 2024/25 and increased its balance to £1.820 million as at 31 March 2025