

County Councillor's Report 21st May – Coffinswell

The leader of Devon County Council, Cllr John Hart, has announced he is leaving the post after 15 years. John became Leader of Devon's opposition Conservative Party in 2007 and won power of the County Council in the 2009 election. He has remained Leader since then.

The Devon Conservative Group will hold a ballot to decide the County's next Leader and John will remain in post until then. He was first elected to his home ward of Wembury and Erme in 1989 and now represents Wembury and Bickleigh after boundary changes.

Mr Hart said among the highlights of his career in Devon were the major reorganisation of education in Exeter and winning a £100 million contract which saw all five secondary schools re-built with a big increase in exam standards along with the development of a number of new primary schools.

He led the council through the national period of austerity and headed Devon's response to the Covid pandemic when the county council was the regional lead authority for the South West. He set up Team Devon with the leaders and chief executives of all Devon's district councils and representatives of the county's town and parish councils and national parks. Team Devon came into its own during Covid when it mobilised to get help and support to the most vulnerable people as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Under John's leadership, the county council has invested some £2 billion on infrastructure including the construction of the South Devon Link Road, major improvements to the North Devon Link Road, the opening of Okehampton railway station and the introduction of daily train services to Exeter and the creation of a new railway station at Marsh Barton in Exeter. He also oversaw the county council's commitment to be net carbon zero by 2030. Latterly he has piloted Devon's devolution deal with the Government in partnership with Torbay Council.

Devon are planning to inject an extra £10 million into repairing the county's roads this year. The proposal is due to go before our Cabinet on Wednesday 8 May – in response to recent budget discussions for additional investment in highways, including drainage.

A better than expected settlement was received from the Government last month to help tackle our overspend on education for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Devon will now make extra money available for road repairs and drainage and will be looking to invest another £10 million into the highway maintenance budget.

The proposed additional £10 million funding will be spent across the county with £7.25 million on extensive patching repairs targeting issues identified by highways officers, County Councillors, town and parish councils and communities. It will also pay for £2 million of drainage improvements and £750,000 will be added to the ongoing road marking replacement programme.

If your community group has a project that could improve people's well-being, or reduce hardship, or provide a warm safe space to work, or learn, or socialise within you area, you can apply for a grant through the Growing Communities Fund.

Since July 2022 funding has been awarded to hundreds of local projects to help them respond to a specific local need.

This year's funding allocation will mean that since the fund was launched, we have made more than £1.1m available to help communities build self-reliance and resilience.

Groups with schemes that bring communities together, alleviate food poverty or tackle loneliness, isolation and build self-esteem, for example, are invited to apply.

Organisers of projects that have a clear and direct community benefit, such as improving the environment, or that use innovation to improve efficiency or proposals that seek to expand the reach of an existing scheme are also encouraged to apply. There is more information at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/communities/growing-communities-fund>

Devon are leading a new organisation which will ensure that all children in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay will have the chance to play a musical instrument, learn to sing and create music

Devon are already responsible for the existing Music Hubs for Devon and Torbay, and from September will work with Plymouth Youth Music Service to lead music education provision across the region.

It follows the recent announcement by Arts Council England and the Department for Education for a new generation of Music Hubs, covering every part of England – and following a competitive application process, Devon have now been confirmed as one of 43 new Hub Lead Organisations.

The new Devon Music Educational Hub will provide high-quality music education and teacher training and give children the opportunity to pursue their musical interests and develop their skills. They will work with schools, music educators and a range of local, regional and national partner organisations.

The new Hubs will also help to deliver the Arts Council's strategy, Let's Create, which aims to improve access to creativity and culture for all children.

Devon County Council and Torbay Council have formally submitted a joint proposal for a Combined County Authority (CCA) to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP.

It's seen by both councils as a major achievement to now submit the application to the government, and to be closer to having the CCA in place in the Autumn. The CCA will deliver the devolution deal which will enable some important decisions to be made on local priorities such as jobs and skills, housing, and the environment.

Councillors at Devon and Torbay councils were given an analysis of the feedback following recent consultation that drew responses from a broad cross-section of organisations including Devon's District councils, Town and Parish councils, and representatives from the business, education and skills, housing, transportation, health service providers and voluntary sectors.

At Torbay Council's specially convened meeting, the vote to progress the CCA proposals was carried unanimously. But not all Councillors at Devon County Council were in agreement – Labour voted against and the Lib Dems and Independents abstained.

The recommendations, however, were carried. In addition to the Devon and Torbay CCA, the County Council will begin the process of establishing the statutory Team Devon Joint Committee, to formalise the existing long-standing partnership between the eight District, City and Borough Councils, Devon Association of Local Councils (representing town and parish councils) and the two national park authorities.