



# **Draft Annual Report 2020/21**

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**West Devon Borough Council**

# Introduction

It has been an incredibly difficult year for us all. Many businesses have had to close for a significant part of the year, individuals have seen their livelihoods impacted, education and health care have been disrupted and some of us have lost loved ones to the global pandemic.

If there is to be a positive in all of this, it has been the tremendous community spirit. Residents of West Devon have come together to ensure that support has been provided where it is needed.

As a Borough council we have played an important role in delivering vital lifelines to our communities, with some £25m of government business grants awarded, emergency welfare support schemes launched and Members taking a lead role in bringing community groups together to ensure that all residents were supported.

While the pandemic required us to refocus officer effort to deliver these new support schemes, we have made really good progress in other areas including coming up with plans for how we can contribute to tackling the Climate and Biodiversity emergency and adopting a five year strategy to support housing need within the Borough.

It is important that we take stock of the impacts of the past year and refocus the council in order to meet future challenges and opportunities. With that in mind, this year we also commenced work on developing 'A Plan for West Devon' which will be adopted during 2020/22

Councillor Neil Jory  
Leader of the Council

Andy Bates  
Chief Executive

# 2020/21 In Numbers

**2,154**

Residents supported with debt, housing and employment advice through our partnership with Citizens Advice

Funding to support our key towns recovery from covid-19

**£100k**

**630**

Visits to support businesses with Covid-19 Safety Measures

**£8,877**

Awarded to maintain community facilities across West Devon through capital grants

**21**

Anti-Social Behaviour Referrals dealt with

**31**

Councillor computers repurposed to enable home education

Residents properties adapted to support their needs, enabling them to remain in their own homes

**71**

**£13k**

Member community grants

**£25m**

Awarded in Government Business Grants

A number of recent changes to Government funding means the Council no longer receives any Government Grant (Revenue Support Grant). It therefore has to be self-sufficient to fund all of its services. The Council has committed to protecting frontline services where possible.

Of every £1 in council tax paid, only 11 pence goes to West Devon Borough Council to pay for the services it provides. Therefore £238.32 of your overall council tax bill goes to West Devon Borough Council for a Band D household.

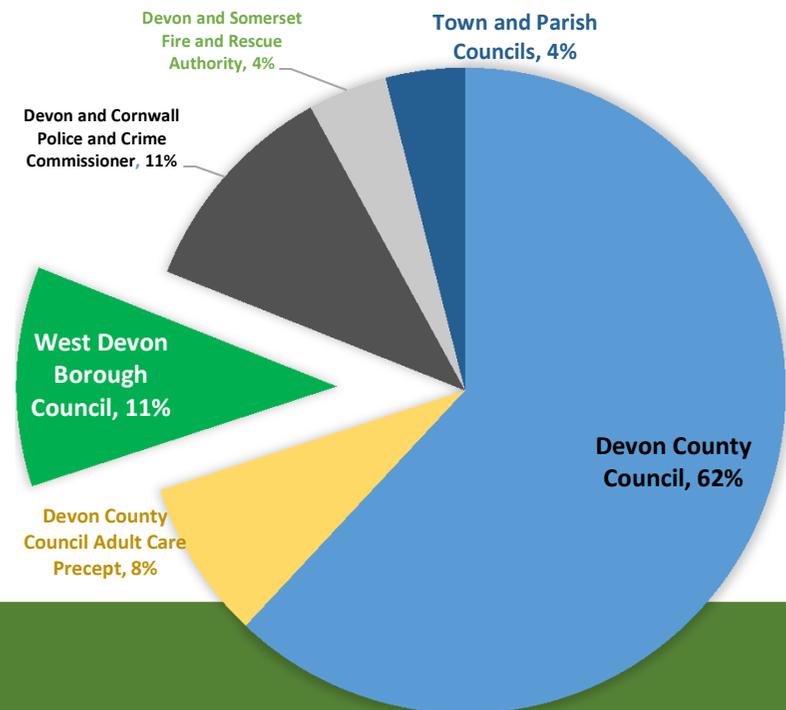
This contribution pays for services such as local planning, housing, environmental health, waste collection and recycling, street cleansing, providing recreational facilities, tourism and economic development. As well as being responsible for collecting the Council Tax, West Devon Borough Council also collects Business Rates and administers housing benefits.

At the point of preparing this report we are pleased to say that due to prudent financial management of our budgets, and additional covid-19 specific support from Central Government, our latest forecast is for a small surplus of £23,000 is predicted.

### Looking Ahead

West Devon Borough Council plans to spend £22.7 million on providing services for 2021/22 (known as our Gross budget). A total of £17.8 million of this amount comes from the income we receive from grants, fees, charges and our share of business rates. This means that the amount of council tax we need to collect is £4.9 million.

### Where your Council Tax went 2020,



# Our Finances

**Over the next few pages, we set out some of the positive steps the Council has taken during 2020/21 to support our residents, economy, communities and to ensure our services are fit for the future.**

# Supporting our Residents

In a year that has been challenging for all residents of West Devon, the Council has focused much of its effort on ensuring existing support was maintained while putting new support measures in place.

| Action                                      | 20/21 Update  |
|---|---|
| Covid-19 response                           | <p>During 2020/21 we took steps to ensure our residents were supported throughout the pandemic, we increased our Money Advice offering from 3 days to 5 days, launched an emergency welfare fund to support individuals that found themselves without money for essentials and delivered food parcels to our most vulnerable residents that were required to shield but couldn't access food and essential supplies.</p> <p>Our Councillors formed Community Clusters in order to ensure a joined up response between the Council and the Voluntary Sector - holding regular focused meetings online.</p> |
| Homes Strategy – Better Homes, Better Lives | <p>During the year we developed and adopted a five year strategy setting out how we'll ensure all of our residents have access to safe and warm homes.</p>  |
| Disabled Facilities Grants                  | <p>In the last 12 months we've enabled 71 residents to live in their homes more safely by adapting their property.</p>  |
| A warmer and more energy efficient home     | <p>During the year we've enabled 330 families to access energy efficient measures for their homes in addition to awarding grants to 38 of the least energy efficient properties for installing first time central heating</p>   |
| Counselling and Mentoring Young People      | <p>Through our membership of the Community Safety Partnership, we've worked with young people in Tavistock involved in county lines and exploitation. The young people have now disengaged with these concerning activities and continue to attend the youth sessions.</p>  |
| Support to our Leisure Services             | <p>During the year we worked closely with our Leisure provider, Fusion, to support them during a period which saw all Leisure Centres forced to closed. By providing financial support to cover essential operating costs while closed, we've ensured that the centres were in a position to reopen to our residents as Covid-19 restrictions began to lift.</p>  |

# Supporting the Economy

This year has been incredibly challenging for many of our business, most of which were required to close as part of the national effort to stop the spread of Covid-19. The Council has acted quickly to ensure that vital lifelines have been made available to businesses across the Borough.

| Action  | 2020/21  |
|---|--|
| Providing government business grants          | The Council acted quickly, using its new IT platform to develop application processes for businesses to claim much needed grants. A total of £25m in grants was awarded throughout the year. An incredible effort by the team.   |
| Covid safety advice and Support to businesses | The challenges of Covid required many businesses to adapt in order to offer a safe customer experience. To support our existing environmental health team, we appointed Covid-19 Compliance Officers to offer businesses and towns safety advice and support. Since they joined us in November, 630 visits to businesses have been undertaken across West Devon (and South Hams)   |
| Business Growth Support and Advice            | Through our partnership with Business Information Point, we have provided over 79 hours 1-to-1 support to 30 businesses. Support for the businesses has focused on advice to deal with the covid-19 pandemic, financial, marketing and business development support. We also ran a week long fully funded online course through the pop-up business school, leading to the launching of a West Devon Business Forum on Facebook to enable businesses across the Borough to network |
| Supporting our highstreets                    | The Council were awarded just under £100,000 to support Reopening of the Local High Streets as Covid restrictions begun being lifted. Working with Town Councils, we advertised our Towns, provided additional marshalls to encourage social distancing, enhancing the appearance of the high street but placing art in vacant shop window. We're developing plans to do more of the same in 2021/22   |
| Spending Local                                | During the year, a new Procurement Strategy was considered. As part of the Strategy, the Council have made a commitment to explore opportunities to spend more of its budget with suppliers within the West Devon Borough Council area   |
| Supporting our key towns                      | During the year we have supported the Tavistock Business Improvement District with its renewal proposals, hosted two conversations with businesses and town Councillors in Tavistock and Okehampton to better understand the needs of the place, begun conversations with Okehampton about how their businesses may want to work together in the future, and positioned Okehampton and Tavistock at the heart of an application for £922k of Community Renewal Fund monies.        |

**Slide 7**

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**NH1**

Oke business support and Tavistock Bid - renewal process

Neil Hawke, 01/07/21

# Enhancing our Communities

| Action  | 2020/21   |
|---|---|
| Support to community schemes                                | Our Members each have a locality fund of £500 a year which enables them to support local community initiatives. During 2020/21, over 35 schemes were awarded a total of £12,976. During the year we also launched a specific Covid-19 grant scheme which awarded funding to support voluntary sector schemes such as developing educational videos during lockdown, establishing delivery of essential supplies to residents and delivering food parcels to families that would normally receive free school meals. |
| Adopted a Climate and Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan | During 2020/21 the Council adopted a Climate and Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan which sets out specific actions that the Council and our communities can take to respond to the emergency.   |
| Community Safety  | During the year to Sept 2019- Oct 2021, 21 Anti-Social Behaviour referrals were made to the Community Safety Partnership. Included in these were issues with young people causing problems in Okehampton. The ASB Officer and the Police Youth Intervention Officers have worked with the Youth Offending Team to address the behaviour. Generally, there is positive engagement by all partner agencies and monthly ASB meetings continue to be held.  |
| Seamoor Lotto   | Our community lottery, now in its 3 <sup>rd</sup> year, is enabling 101 charity and community groups across West Devon and South Hams to raise over £25,000 a year.   |

# Service Delivery and Governance

Throughout the year, we're really pleased that the significant majority of our services continued to be delivering in addition to the new services we implemented to respond to the pandemic. Our office staff all transitioned brilliantly to working from home full time and our frontline staff adopted new safety measures to ensure they could continue to support our residents and communities.

| Action                               | 2020/21  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Maintaining services                 | <p>We took the decision in March that all office staff should work from home. Our staff have been able to work from home for many years and so this was a smooth transition.</p> <p>We supported employees through the transition to homeworking, including providing advice and guidance on maintaining health and wellbeing, and holding regular staff briefings online. A number of staff also trained as Mental Health First Aiders and can now offer support to colleagues.</p> <p>We also continued to recruit staff with our recruitment process shifting to an online interview process.</p> |
| Revising our budget                  | <p>Covid had a significant impact on our finances with some of our key income sources being impacted through the national lockdowns. As a result, in September, we developed and agreed a revised budget for the year. Fortunately additional funding has been provided by Government to contribute to some of the financial losses we suffered.</p>   |
| Continuing to develop our priorities | <p>We have made great progress in pushing ahead with our priorities having adopted a number of strategies focusing on Housing, Climate and Biodiversity Strategy and Consultation and Engagement. The focus for the coming year will be on delivering against the action plans for these. We have also made good progress in developing the 'Plan for West Devon'</p>  |
| Democracy Online                     | <p>The Council quickly took steps to implement remote meetings of its committees. All 31 Members of the Council were able to participate in the democratic process and our residents were able to watch meetings online. A total of 35 formal committee meetings were held online during the year.</p>   |
| Three-Weekly Waste Collections       | <p>During the year we commenced a trial of 1,000 properties moving to three-weekly waste collections and enhanced recycling services. The results of the trial will be considered during 2021/22 and if successful, may be rolled out across the Borough.</p>  |