



West Devon Borough Council Draft Annual Report 2021/2022





Councillor Neil Jory
Leader West Devon Borough Council

This intro will be populated following the Hub Committee meeting on 7th June 2022

Clr Neil Jory



Andy Bates
Chief Executive

I have been incredibly impressed by the efforts of staff across the Council to support our residents and communities.

We began the year continuing with our response to the global pandemic and as we ended the year teams from across the Council were stepping up to support the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

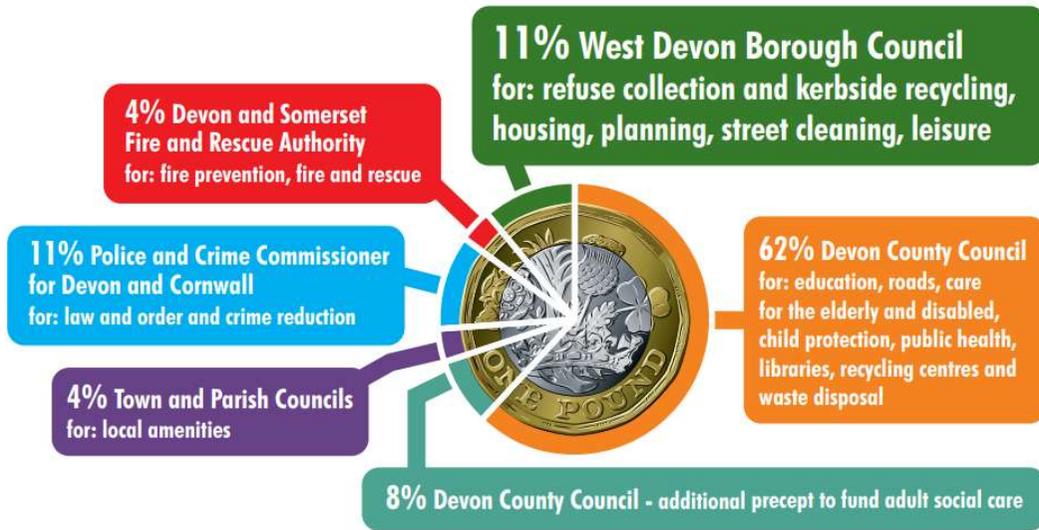
While our staff have continued to work from home throughout the pandemic, as we end the year we have started to see a return to a form of normality, bringing our office staff together and working face to face. I have to say, personally it has been fantastic to begin meeting colleagues in the office for the first time in over two years!

I've also been pleased to have been able to begin joining local Members in their Towns and Parishes, experiencing first hand the incredibly positive work being delivered across the Borough. I look forward to being able to carry out many more of these insightful visits in the coming year.

The year has of course not been without its challenges, we have, like many organisations, experienced challenges in recruiting staff to our services. This is no doubt in part due to the changes to ways of working, with local people now able to work remotely for organisations from across the UK. We will be working on plans to address this in the coming months.

Andy Bates

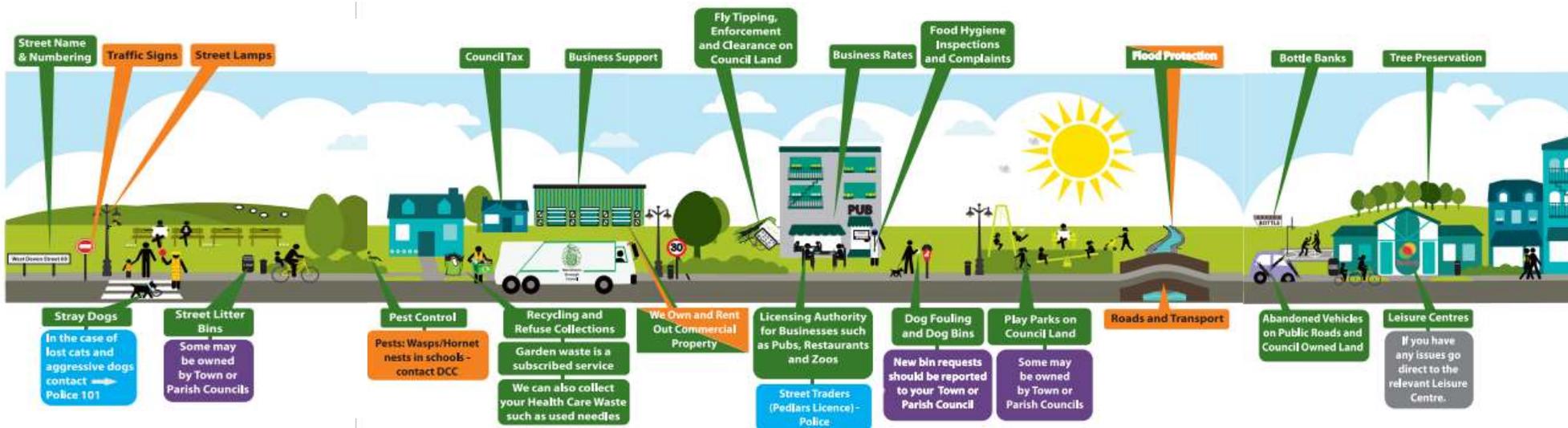
Where your money goes



West Devon Borough Council plans to spend £23.3 million (gross) on providing services for 2022/23. A total of £18.2 million of this amount comes from the income we receive from grants, fees and charges. Therefore the amount of council tax we need to collect is £5.1 million. The Council's net budget has increased slightly from £7.3 million in 2021/22 to £7.8 million in 2022/23.

The Council now has to be entirely independent to fund all of its services on a budget of just £7.8 million, as the Borough Council no longer receives any main Government Grant (Revenue Support Grant) and has had a reduction in core Government funding of £3 million per year since 2010.

The Council continues to share staff with South Hams District Council. West Devon Borough Council is generating ongoing annual savings of £2.2 million from a joint Transformation Programme and sharing services with South Hams District Council. The Councils' shared workforce has been reduced by 30% through the T18 Transformation Programme and processes have been redesigned around the customer. The radical programme has changed how the Councils' work, to deliver more efficiencies and to retain the Councils' front line services. Just some of the services are set out below.



Working with our communities

From awarding funding to support community schemes to ensuring we've continued to deliver leisure facilities within the Borough

Open spaces, welcome places

During the year, we've spent £111,744 on open space, sport and recreation facilities and allocated a further £21,035 via grant offer letters for future projects. Projects include Okehampton All Weather Pitch rejuvenation (see picture), Storage shelves and lockers for Okehampton Community Garden, plants and labour for Okehampton Sensory garden, path re-laying at Tavistock sensory garden and land purchase and improvements to Tavistock Rugby club – among others!



£10k

Awarded to 31
community schemes
through our Councillor
Locality Funds



Clamping down on Anti Social Behaviour

Following increasing instances of anti-social behaviour in Tavistock over the past 12 months, we ran a public consultation over the summer and as a result, in October we agreed a new Public Space Protection Order meaning more powers to take action against individuals acting in an anti-social way



£111k

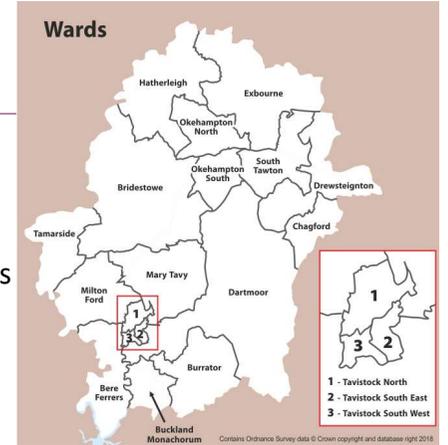
Of section 106 funding provided to deliver schemes in communities



30 young people joined Summer activities aimed at reducing Anti-Social Behaviour through our links with Community Safety Partnership

Supporting Local

Each year our Councillors have a budget to award to schemes within their locality. This year over £10,219 was awarded in support of 31 community schemes – from funding First Aid workshops, supporting road safety schemes through to coffee mornings and jubilee celebrations – all schemes that will make a positive difference in our communities.



Keeping our spaces & facilities maintained

We know that its important for our residents and visitors to keep our parking and other public areas well maintained. This year, among other activities, we carried out kerb stone reset, double yellow line repainting and car park relining in Hatherleigh – one of the market towns in the Borough.

We've also undertaken works through our toilet refurbishment programme with painting, replacing locks, replacing urinals and boxing in pipework and flooring. Unfortunately due to subsequent vandalism more work is needed but none the less, great work by the team to ensure that essential facilities continue to be maintained for the benefit of all.





In December, we were pleased to be able to support Tavistock Dickensian evening, using Government Welcome Back Funds and some of our own staff for marshalling of the event – ensuring everyone had an memorable and safe evening. Just one of the many events we've supported through the year.

Wellbeing for West Devon

Ensuring the wellbeing of our residents has continued to be a major focus for the Council and we've made positive progress on this front.

Is West Devon **Pitch** Perfect?

It is now!

Helping people to enjoy different sports is a crucial element to improving the health and wellbeing of our communities. In November we launched a consultation on a new Play Pitch Strategy for the Borough and the strategy will now give us a clear direction for the next 3-5 years.



£3.9m

Of support provided to residents who needed help to pay their Council Tax through the CT reduction scheme

£33k

Awarded to 32 community schemes through our Health and Wellbeing grant fund

94,675

Total Active participation in sport and leisure at our leisure centres Jan 21- Dec 21 (note centres were closed Jan – March)

Fit for the future

In April, our Leisure Centres (Meadowlands and Parklands) were able to reopen following lockdowns and we've worked closely with our provider, Fusion, to encourage people to take up activities. As at January 2022, compared to pre-pandemic levels, Membership has returned to 90% at Meadowlands and 75% at Parklands.



Residents were so keen to get back to indoor exercises at our leisure centres they held a special class at

5:45am

on 17th May – the first day indoor exercise was allowed to recommence

109%

Levels of membership of Parklands Leisure Centre Swim school compared to pre-pandemic levels!

2225

 residents

Supported through our partner, Citizens Advice resulting in an income gain of £783,936.

Supporting those that need it

[Home](#) > [Residents](#) > [Benefits and Support](#)

Support Directory

To help residents find help and support quickly and easily when they need it, we have created this directory of support services and charities operating in the South Hams and West Devon.

If you represent an organisation that isn't listed, please contact us and we can add your details. Please email our [Support Team](#).

Assistance from the Council <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Housing Advice✓ Environmental Health and Housing✓ Disabled facilities grants Council Support >	Housing Assistance Grants <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Accessible Homes grants✓ Healthy Homes grants✓ Home Improvement loans Housing Assistance Grants >	Fuel Poverty <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Struggling with energy bills✓ Grants and Support✓ Energy Advice Fuel Poverty information >
Mobility Assistance <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Assisted waste collections✓ Mobility equipment grants✓ Property adaptations Mobility Assistance >	Financial Assistance <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Free School Meals✓ Crisis grants✓ Check benefit entitlement Financial Assistance >	Homelessness <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Sleeping rough✓ Threatened with homelessness✓ Landlord negotiation Homelessness Support >

In December we launched a new online directory to signpost local people to get help over the winter (and beyond). With so much support available, the new webpages aim to simplify the process for residents looking for help and support, including details on how to access emergency funding, where to get help if you have mobility needs, support available to meet essential energy costs and much more.

Health and Wellbeing at the heart of what we do

We know that community groups have been at the forefront of supporting our residents wellbeing throughout the pandemic and that the impacts on both Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing are continuing to be felt. To support the amazing work happening in our communities this year we supported 32 community led schemes with over £33,000 to deliver wellbeing activities in the coming 12 months



On 5th April 2022 we welcomed the community winners of the 21021/22 Mayoral Awards to receive their certificates from Mayor Caroline Mott. Among those to win awards are a dedicated volunteer of more than 50 years, a Hatherleigh resident who worked tirelessly to gauge people's experiences through COVID lockdowns and an Okehampton street cleaner, who regularly goes above and beyond the call of duty. Communities working together for the wellbeing of us all.

Natural Environment

During the year we have continued to progress delivery of our ambitious Climate and Biodiversity Action Plan as well as delivering on our wider commitments for our Natural Environment .



Proposals for new **Woodland**

During the year we continued to progress plans for new woodland at Yelverton and Horrbridge. The plans include enabling two areas of council owned land to naturally regenerate – one of the sites already has some evidence of young trees starting to appear after grazing ended a couple of years ago. The next step is to apply to the English Woodland Creation Offer for funding which would pay for the preparation and maintenance of the sites. All contributing to our plans for increasing biodiversity across the Borough.

Improving energy **efficiency** of WD rental properties

There are approximately 700 homes in West Devon that may not meet minimum required energy standards. This year we successfully bid to the Private Rented Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard competition which meant we were awarded £44,331 (with South Hams). Now, working with Tamar Community Energy we'll be rolling out a grant programme for landlords in order to ensure that their properties meet a minimum energy efficiency rating of E. This will be launched in May 2022.

25

year lease agreed for council land in Milton Abbot to establish a community allotment, supporting biodiversity and local produce

7,500

Staff commuting miles saved – approx. 2.2tonnes co2 emissions by working in an agile way



26.41kg

Residual household waste
average per household
(Waste that isn't
recyclable)

10

Grants awarded under
the Green Homes Grant
Scheme – enabling
energy saving measures
for eligible households

8.2Ha

Of Council land approved
to be left to naturally
regenerate in to
woodland

Time to get **Charged**

We know that a lack of available charging points within the Borough is a barrier to many in swapping to electric vehicles. In September we agreed to progress with an opportunity that will see more public electric charging points installed. The initial scheme will enable charging points at Pilgrims Drive Car park, Bere Alston - in addition to charging points already agreed for Tavistock, Okehampton, Chagford and Hatherleigh.

Carbon **Literacy**

It's really important that the Council considers the impacts on the climate of its policy and decision making. This year, 20 senior officers from across Council departments undertook Carbon Literacy training – ensuring they have the key skills to assess the impact, and make decisions that will positively support our climate ambitions.



Built Environment

Planning for the future

Neighbourhood plans play an important role in shaping decisions made by the Borough Councils planning committee in the years ahead. After much work by the local community of Bridestowe and Sourton to develop the plan, a referendum was held in August with 212 votes cast – 94.8% being in favour of the plan and so in September the Council formally adopted the Neighbourhood Plan. Work was also supported to develop a Neighbourhood plan for Milton Abbot, Chilaton and Kelly – with referendum planned for Quarter 1 2022.



2350

Local Authority Land charge searches carried out



Celebrating searches

We were 'Highly Commended' at the 2022 Land Data Local Land Charges awards. These national awards celebrate the work and achievements of land charge departments which carry out the land and property searches required when someone buys a home. Getting a quick response to customers is incredibly important to keep the house buying process moving.

507

Planning Applications received



Planning made simpler

In September we launched a public consultation to help inform improvements to our planning process. As a result, in March we began implementing the changes, including a simple checklist to help applicants easily understand which application forms and supporting documents they need to submit for the work they want to carry out, and when. We've also increased capacity within our planning team to enable us to improve the customer experience

Leading the way: Government Pathfinder

In June we, along with our partners South Hams District Council and Plymouth City Council, were selected to be a pathfinder by the Department for Levelling Up. The pathfinder is about helping other Councils to standardise key information in local plans – in a digital way. Great to be recognised as leading the way in improving access to information.



212

Votes cast in the Bridestowe & Sourton Neighbourhood Plan referendum

Supporting key Infrastructure

During the year we worked with a number of partners to submit a bid to the Government Levelling Up Tranche 1 fund for a West Devon Transport Hub in Okehampton. While we were notified we'd been unsuccessful, in January we met with Department for Transport who provided encouraging feedback, we'll now be preparing a revised bid for submission in a future funding round.

Better Homes, Better Lives

We know that having a decent, safe home is essential for the wellbeing of all residents. This year we've taken the step of declaring a Housing Crisis in West Devon to highlight the significant shortage of homes within the Borough.

Ethical Lettings

A win –win for landlords and tenants

During 2022 we launched a new ethical lettings website Seamoor Lettings. It offered a professional management service for landlords with a very low monthly fee – meaning more affordable rental for tenants



Helping you downsize

To free up properties for larger families

We know that moving home is expensive, and we also know there is a shortage of 3-4 bedroom homes available in West Devon, so in January we launched a scheme offering £5,000 to social housing tenants who offered to downsize to a smaller home.

580

Households on the housing register (March 2022)

13.8

Number of days on average to process a new Housing Benefit Claim (well below the national target of 17 days)



41

Disabled facilities grants completed – delivering schemes to enable residents to stay in their own homes longer



Action on the crisis!

In February the Council declared a Housing Crisis within the Borough, and quickly took steps to develop a detailed action plan containing 15 specific actions. This will be a key focus for us in the coming year.

Green Light on housing for our most vulnerable

In December, our Development Management Committee approved a planning application to build 11 new homes to be used as temporary accommodation in Tavistock. The next step is for the works to be tendered and a contractor appointed



£3.8m

In Council Tax support awarded to support those in financial difficulty

103

Households supported to prevent them becoming homeless

National
empty
homes
Week 2022
Feb 28–March 6

Best Use of Properties

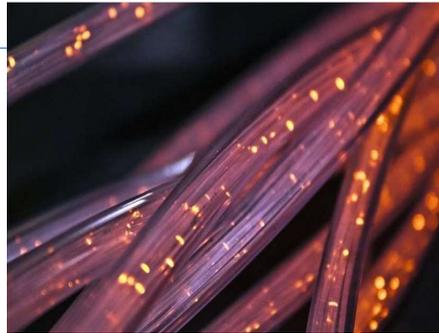
In March we promoted Empty Homes week and Lendology – an ethical lender supporting homeowners make improvements to bring homes in to use. During the last two years, £132,000 has been lent to homeowners in West Devon to make such improvements.

Stimulating a thriving economy

2021/22 continued to see sectors within our economy impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, but we've taken positive steps to support West Devon businesses in to the future.

Connected West Devon

During the year we held a series of workshops to coach volunteers in how to support their local communities get better broadband. On the back of this, 45 community champions have stepped up to work across the borough, working alongside the Council to help identify solutions to improve digital connectivity – helping more people and businesses get better connected



Covid Grants: Vital support for businesses

Throughout the year our teams continued to deliver vital support to businesses impacted by the ongoing pandemic. In total, as at 31st March, some £33m had been awarded to businesses.

Safeguarding a resilient economy

In March we agreed to continue with our support of Tavistock Business Improvement District. The BID supports 312 businesses in Tavistock and is a key to the future economic success of the town. During the year we have also commenced conversations with businesses in Okehampton about the possibility of a BID or Chamber of Commerce. That work is ongoing and will shape up in the coming year.

£33m

In Covid Business Support Grants processed in the last two years providing a vital lifeline across business sectors

24

Activities delivered to support our highstreets recover from Covid-19, maximising £80k of EU funds



25

Business schemes supported to develop projects that would benefit the wider community with a total £196k investment



The Dartmoor Line returns

For the first time in nearly 50 years, in November, regular passenger services began to run again connecting Okehampton to Exeter. We, alongside the County Council and local community have campaigned for this line to be reinstated for years as a vital link for our residents, businesses and visitors to the national rail network .

Welcome Back to our highstreets

During the year, we supported our High Streets to recover from the impacts of Covid-19 by accessing EU and Government Funding. This enabled us to deliver a series of marketing campaigns for the area, support events and deliver a number of schemes to Towns to enhance the street scene. In total the investment for the year was in excess of £75,000. We were also able to employ two business advice officers helping businesses adapt to the ‘new normal’



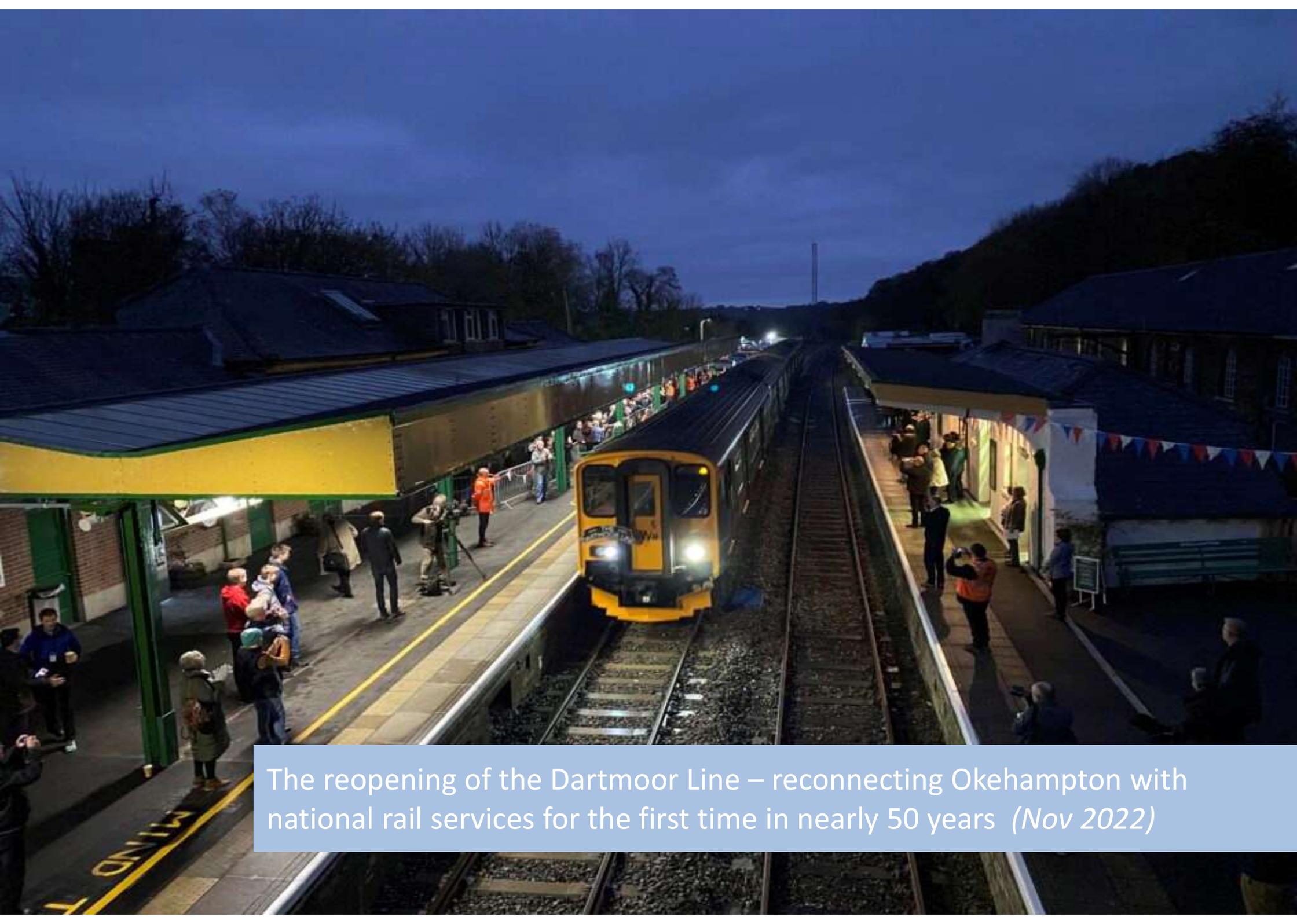
300

Engagements with businesses looking for support related to business start-up and growth advice during the year through our contract with BIP



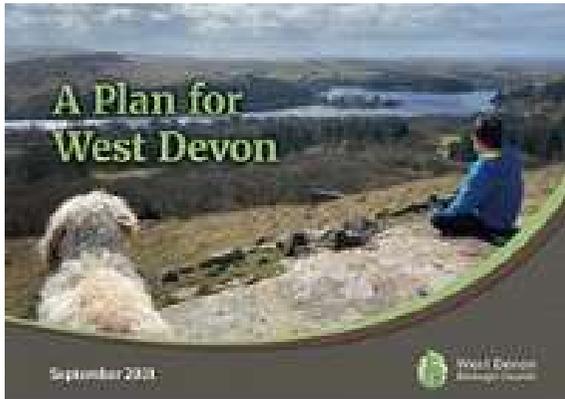
Supporting a community wide recovery

During the year we offered community groups and businesses that were looking to grow their offering to bid for funds from the Government business grants scheme. 25 schemes were supported with a total investment of £196k. Scheme supported include enhancements to a rugby club house to enable greater community use, incubators for a community farm that offers children opportunities to get in to farming activities and a project that seeks to extend a shop to offer a photography space – with free workshops for the community too!



The reopening of the Dartmoor Line – reconnecting Okehampton with national rail services for the first time in nearly 50 years (Nov 2022)

Inclusive and Accessible Services



Informing our future plans

In July and August we undertook a consultation on our draft strategy for West Devon (now known as 'A Plan for West Devon'). We undertook interviews on the streets, provided an online survey and enabled residents to write to us with their comments. Our consultation activities attracted 375 responses which helped shape the final strategy. A further 501 comments and quick polls were completed on social media.

43,406

Calls to our contact centre

We said We did

We know that its incredibly important that when you have to contact the Council, you can understand what to expect – from expected timescales for a response through to clarity over what we can (and can't) do to help. With that in mind, this year we've developed a user friendly Customer Charter for our planning service. We'll be further building on this in the coming months with a Council wide Customer Charter.

Our Commitments and what we expect from you:

Our Commitments – we will:

- Take pride in our performance and achievements
- Be helpful, polite, and treat you with fairness and respect
- Let you know who is dealing with your application / enquiry and make it clear

Your Commitments – you will:

- Treat our staff with respect and deal with us in a professional and courteous manner
- Tell us when your circumstances change
- Understand that you may not get the outcome that you want and that we may not always be able to solve your issues - but we can signpost you to the right support

75%

Of feedback on our online processes rate it as 4-5 stars (5 stars being the best)



534,600

Visits to our website during the year – with an average time on the site of just under 2 minutes

70

Hours of committee meetings broadcast live – enabling our residents to follow the democratic decision making process

375

Contributions from residents, businesses and visitors to help shape our strategy



Return to the Chamber

Having moved to online meetings in 2020 in response to the pandemic, May 2021 saw our first face to face meeting in over a year. While it felt very different (with screens and facemasks among many safety measures in place), it was great to get back in to the Chamber and continue with the democratic processes.

Online feedback

Now that our new online systems are fully operational, this year we've turned on a feature that enables our customers to tell us how easy they found an online process as soon as they've completed it. This means that we can quickly analyse feedback and adapt our processes to make it easier for future customers. We had 534,600 visits to our website during the year so its important that we make it a user friendly experience!





We have 31 Councillors representing residents across the Borough. In September Councillor Robin Musgrave announced he was stepping down from his role as a Borough Councillor. He was first elected to the Council back in 1991, holding the role for four years until 1995 then returning again in 2007 – an incredible contribution to the area.

Performance and Resources

It's been another busy year for our staff, with them continuing to respond to a global pandemic as well continuing to deliver core services that our residents and businesses need. We've carried out a number of service reviews throughout the year, seen our customer improvements recognised at a national level and set a balanced budget again!

Ensuring you get a **good level of service**

During this year we have progressed with plans to carry out reviews of our services, with a focus on ensuring that we offer our residents the best level of service possible. We have already reviewed our Planning Service and Revenues and Benefits Service – this has meant adding additional capacity to our planning team to enable them to keep up with the volume of applications coming through and we have been able to re-align capacity to develop a team to lead our response to the Housing Crisis. All of which means we'll be able to better support the needs of our residents.



Customer Achievements Recognised

In March we won a gold award in respect of our customer facing IT transformation programme. User-friendly software has enabled three quarters (75%) of citizens to benefit from self-service functionality to date. And, by freeing up teams from the burden of navigating broken processes and siloed data, the two councils have saved an impressive £450,000 over 12 months.

£450k

Saved in 12 months (across West Devon and South Hams) by implementing easier to use, customer friendly software

7,500

Staff commuting miles saved – approx. 2.2tonnes co2 emissions by working in an agile way



67%

Average new service requests completed within one week of being received



Balancing the Budget

As set out earlier in the report, we receive 8% of your total Council Tax bill which pays for a whole host of services – so its important we plan well and spend it on the right things. In December we were hoping for longer term certainty on funding from Government but that didn't come –however in February we still set a balanced budget, ensuring we will be able to continue to provide essential services and support those most in need within the Borough.

Celebrating colleagues achievements

In December, we were able to celebrate the amazing efforts that staff from across the Council have made to deliver quality services for our residents and businesses. From delivering activities that are seen on the ground such as ensuring a great visitor experience, delivering business grants and other Covid-19 activities through to just as important recognition of colleagues that are known for offering a listening ear to others! Great work.

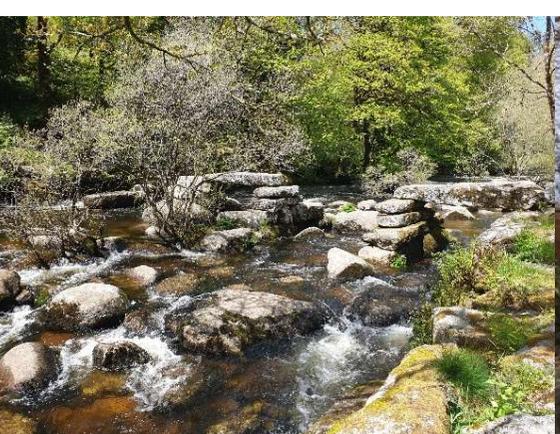


Investing in our future

During the year we've ensured our colleagues are well placed to provide quality Council Services. 5 members of staff have commenced apprenticeships . Three are undertaking a Level 7 qualification in Chartered Town Planning, 1 in Business Administration and 1 in Supervisory skills. We also supported 5 young people through the Government Kick Start scheme (for those 16-24 year olds on Universal Credit). One of the young people has since secured a permanent post in the Council.

We've also secured two places on a highly sought after National future leaders programme as another way of developing our own talent





A Plan for West Devon

We know that the year ahead will be challenging for many across the Borough as the cost of living continues to provide day to day challenges. We will of course do all we can to support our residents by delivering the essential support you need in addition to delivering on our Strategy. Some of the key activities from our strategy for the coming year include:-

- Taking steps to implement a rural poverty scheme by working with communities and partners
- Working with partners to develop a new Marketing Strategy for West Devon
- Launch a new, easier to navigate website – making it easier for you to access services online

And also.....



Housing Crisis

A significant focus for us during 2022/23 will be on delivering our action plan to address the Housing Crisis in West Devon. We will be pressing ahead with our action plan while continuing to deliver on our longer term housing strategy,

Climate Emergency

This year we will be in the third year of delivery of our Climate and Biodiversity Emergency Action Plan. We will be continuing to deliver on those actions including ensuring the Council delivers on commitments including progressing plans for an electric fleet and continuing with our wild flowering on Council land

Homes for Ukraine

As the conflict in Ukraine continues, we will be ensuring that the Borough Council develops a package of support for our Ukrainian guests and those residents stepping up to offer them a safe space to live. We'll be working closely with the voluntary sector to ensure wrap-around support and to ensure that as many host/sponsor placements as possible are maintained as they come towards the end of the minimum term.

Levelling Up

A significant focus for the Council in the coming 12 months will be submitting bids for Levelling Up funding and the Shared Prosperity Fund.

We'll be identifying and working up bids for projects that can make a positive difference to the lives of our communities and businesses in the future.