

West Devon Annual Report



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Introduction

The 2016/17 financial year has undoubtedly been a challenging year with reduced central funding for local government. We have however, continued to work in partnership with South Hams District Council which has allowed West Devon Borough Council to achieve annual savings of £2.2 million and more importantly protect all front line services.

During the year we have been unrelenting in seeking and attempting to deliver efficiencies and improving services. We have done this by adopting innovative IT solutions which admittedly haven't been without their glitches but are now steadily improving performance. 60% of customer queries are resolved at the first point of contact. Significant improvements have also been made in planning and benefits processing times.

The Council has made substantial progress in designing services which are more in line with our customers' requirements and as far as possible are future proofed. Our staff are to be congratulated for the way in which they have managed the significant changes that the organisation has undergone and they, together with the Councillors, are proud of what we have achieved.

The year has also seen the Council make good progress with the Joint Local Plan, a strategic planning document which sets out development and growth up until 2034. Working together West Devon Borough, South Hams District and Plymouth City Councils have approved a Joint Local Plan which subject to further community consultation and examination is on track to be adopted later this year and will set home building and job targets for all three authorities.

Commitment
to Joint Local
Plan

£2.2m
annual saving

No
services to
communities
removed



A challenging
year



Reduced central
funding



Protect all front
line services



Improving
performance

**Our business is
our customer**

The Council has continued to play an influential role in sub regional debate on a number of key topics including devolution and productivity and continues to work closely with the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to secure Growth Deals to facilitate economic growth, job creation and prosperity in the area.



Philip Sanders

Cllr Philip Sanders
Leader of the Council



Steve Jorden

Steve Jorden
Executive Director
(Strategy & Commissioning)
and Head of Paid Service



Sophie Hosking

Sophie Hosking
Executive Director,
Service Delivery and
Commercial Development



Working together



Designing
services

Sub regional
debate

Joint
Local Plan

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Finance

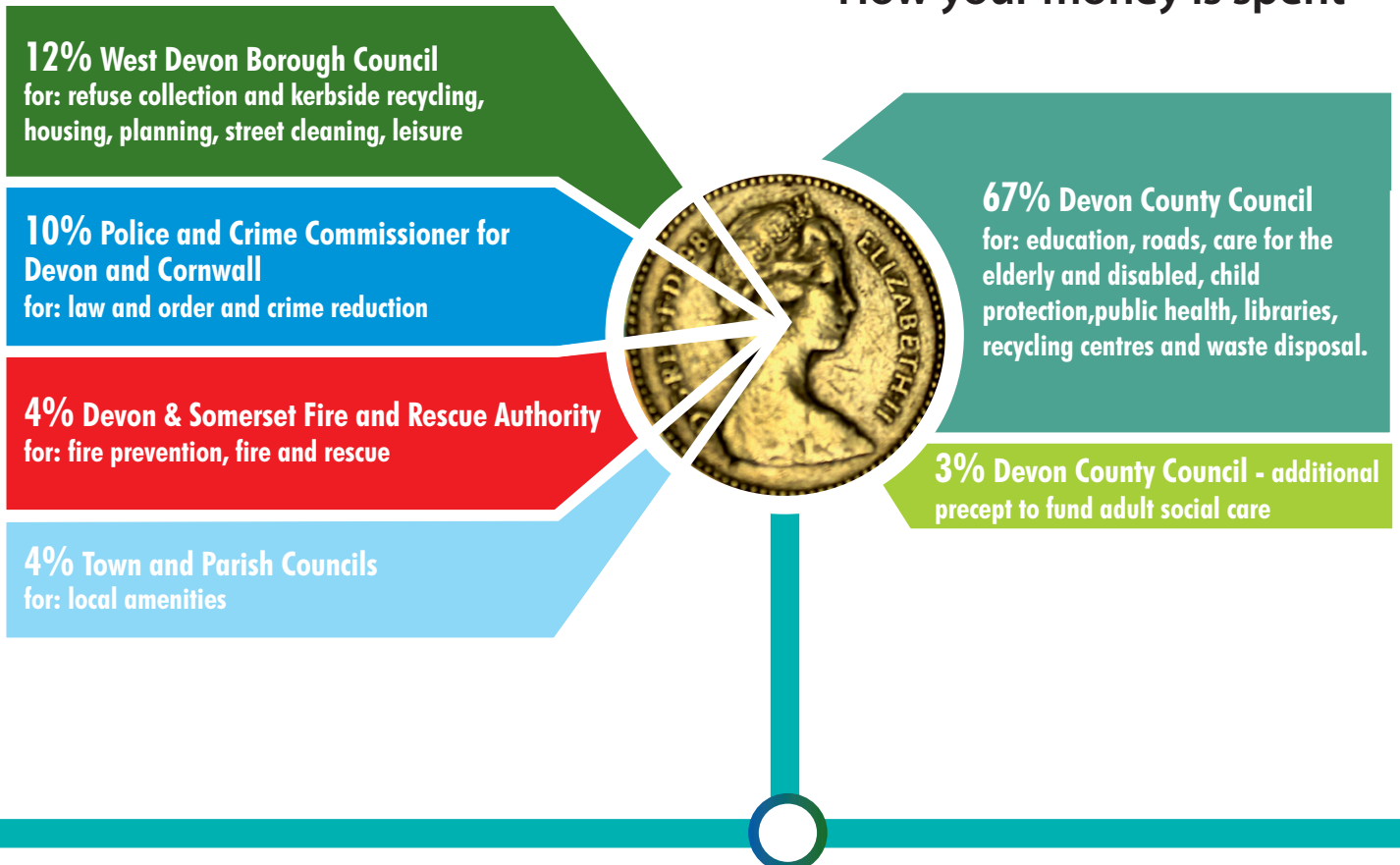
The Council's net budget is £7.4 million for 2017/18. By 2018/19 the Council will receive no core Government funding (Revenue Support Grant) and the Council will need to be self-sufficient.

The withdrawal of Government funding has happened two years earlier than expected. The Council is facing a budget gap over the next two years of £1 million, which the Council is planning to cover through a combination of generating income through business development, ensuring maximum use of its assets, and further reduction in costs.

The Council increased its element of Council Tax by £5 for 2017/18 to £218.39 for a Band D property. Of the money that West Devon collects in Council tax (an average Band D bill is £1,809) only 12% goes to services provided by West Devon, the rest goes to Devon County Council, the local Town or Parish Council, the Fire and Police services.

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How your money is spent



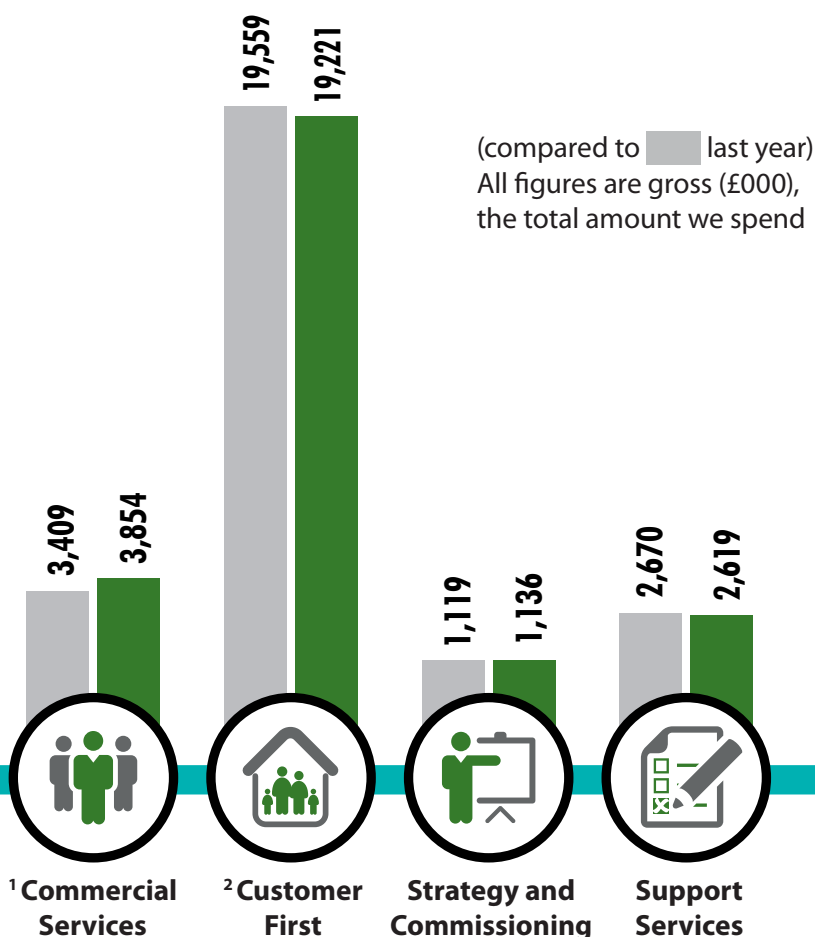


Financial performance for the year to 31st March 2017

The 2016/17 budget for West Devon was £7.3 million but the actual spend is predicted to be 0.4% lower, providing a saving of £35,000 which will go into the Council's Unearmarked Reserves which stand at £1.06 million. The Council's financial strategy recognises the need to maintain these reserves to provide stability for both medium and longer term financial planning and to provide a contingency against unforeseen events. Maintaining a level of reserves also protects against the volatility of some income and expenditure budgets which can be dependent on economic conditions, the weather and tourism.

The Council's gross expenditure was £26.8 million for 2016/17. Gross income for the year was £19.5 million, resulting in a net budget for 2016/17 of £7.3 million. The Council receives income from Government grants (such as rent allowances, revenue support grant and new homes bonus) and from business rates and fees and charges.

The Council's spending plans for 2016/17 and 2017/18



2017/18
£26.8m
Total gross budget

2016/17
£26.8m
Total gross budget

¹ Includes Recycling and Waste Resource, Public Conveniences, Car Parks and Transport

² Includes Housing, Planning, Environmental Health and the administration of Council Tax, Business Rates and Benefits

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Organisational Effectiveness

Throughout the year we have continued to improve performance to meet the needs of our customers.

We have systematically reviewed areas of poor performance, streamlined processes, embedded new IT solutions and delivered staff training. As a result we have seen a significant reduction in call volumes, an increase in transactions online and quicker turnaround times for planning, benefits and disabled facility grants applications.

Our Workforce

West Devon Borough and South Hams District Council directly employ 292.5 full time equivalent staff to deliver shared services. West Devon Borough Council also has a contracted workforce which delivers a large number of frontline services. Staff throughout the Councils continue to perform well with sickness levels below the national average. HR policies allow a fair relationship between employer and employee and regular staff briefings and an online staff appraisal system ensures staff are up to speed with Council priorities; and able to evidence their achievements and identify any training needs. Both Councils are committed to providing opportunities to young people and currently have 5 apprentices.

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Reduction in call volumes



Audit Assurance

The Council has a number of measures in place to assess its performance. An Audit Committee meets five times a year and its role is to provide an oversight of the financial reporting and audit processes plus the system of internal controls and compliance with laws and regulations. The Council also has two internal audit staff managed by the Devon Audit Partnership who provide an opinion on the internal control environment and governance processes.



External audit is provided by KPMG who in 2016 reported that they were satisfied that in all significant respects the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Risk Management

There is a culture of risk ownership and management throughout the Council throughout 16/17 particular focus has been given to health and safety and information security. Risks are logged centrally and are updated regularly. For

each risk, the uncertainties are identified, along with the consequences, likelihood of occurrence and strategic impacts that would result. The Council's Senior leadership Team review the corporate risk log monthly and updates are reported to Elected Members via the Audit Committee on a biannual basis. Elected Members also have the opportunity to raise concerns with the mitigating actions being taken by officers and can suggest new risks for consideration.

Governance

The Council has a Governance Framework which comprises of the systems, processes, culture and values under which they operate. This is in place to ensure transparent decision making and proper use of public funds and is reported on annually through the Annual Governance Statement. In addition to the controls and procedures mentioned above, the Council's primary governance documents are set out in the Constitution (for example, Contract Procedure Rules, Financial Procedure Rules and Codes of Governance). The Constitution is reviewed annually and adopted at the Annual Meeting for the forthcoming year. The Council has a Report Monitoring process in which all reports are checked against the principles of clarity, fairness, legality, and financial regularity and soundness. The Statutory Officers Panel carries out a rolling review of the Council's core policy documents to ensure that they are kept updated, relevant and effective.



Value for Money



Governance Framework



Constitution annual review



Report Monitoring

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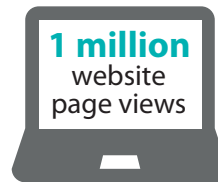
A few things we spent your money on 2016/17



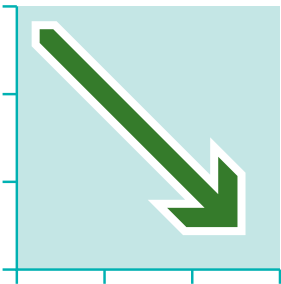
individual household waste collections per annum



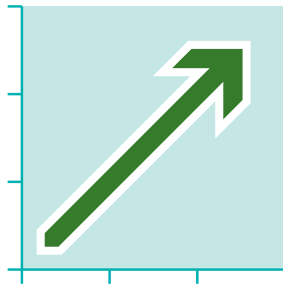
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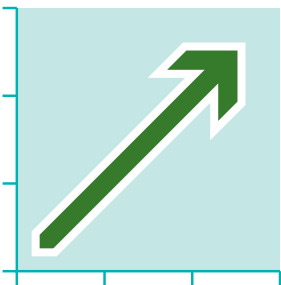
Performance



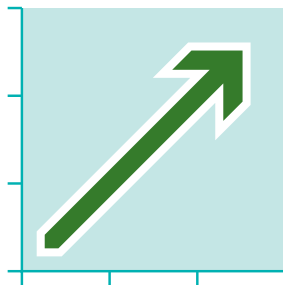
Housing benefit claims processing times reduced from 39 to 16 days



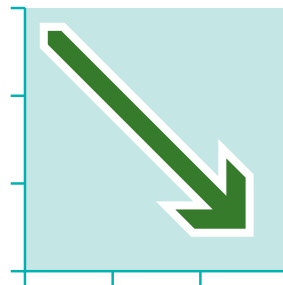
Online transactions increased by 17%



Missed waste collections performing 33% above target



Minor planning determinations delivered on time improved to 96%



Call volumes decreased by 33%



To track the Council's progress throughout the year visit

www.westdevon.gov.uk

Search for Councillors and Committees, Internal Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

For a list of council services visit

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/housing-local-services/local-councils>

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Strategies & Plans

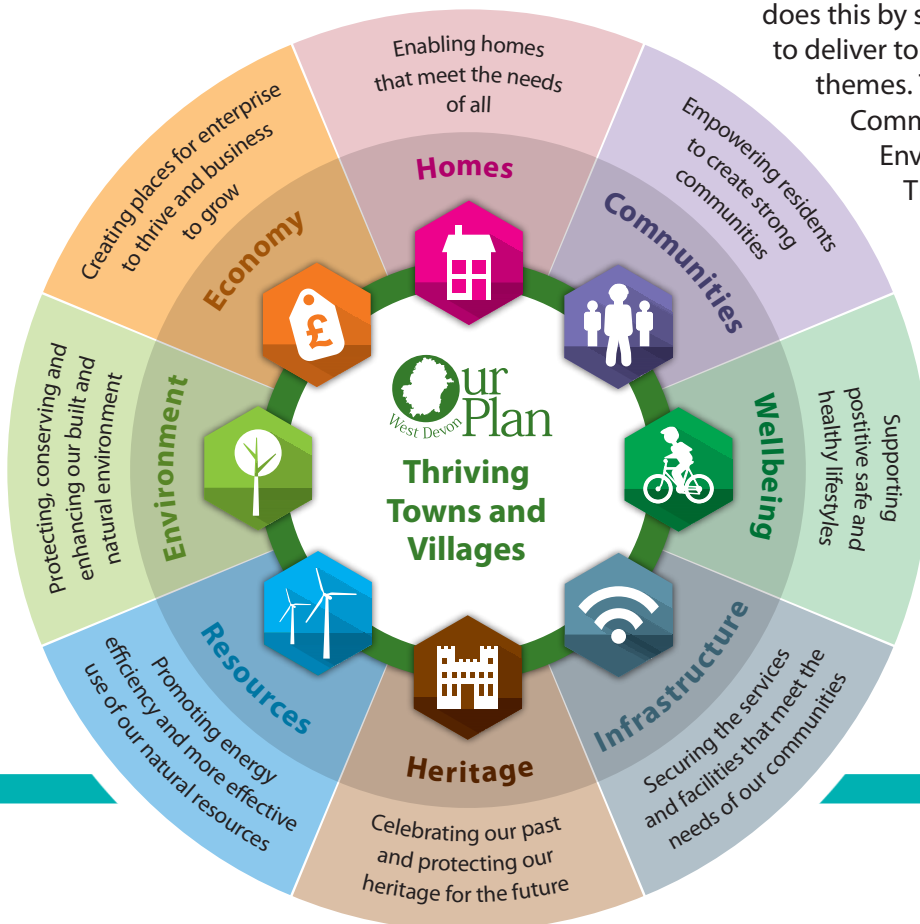
The Council has a number of strategic documents and plans that guide its approach to achieving its vision and ensuring that it remains financially sustainable.



Our Plan

The Council's 'Our Plan' describes the Council's vision and aspirations for our communities. It does this by setting out what the Council wishes to deliver to our communities under eight themes. These themes are: Homes; Economy; Communities; Wellbeing; Infrastructure; Environment; Heritage; and Resources.

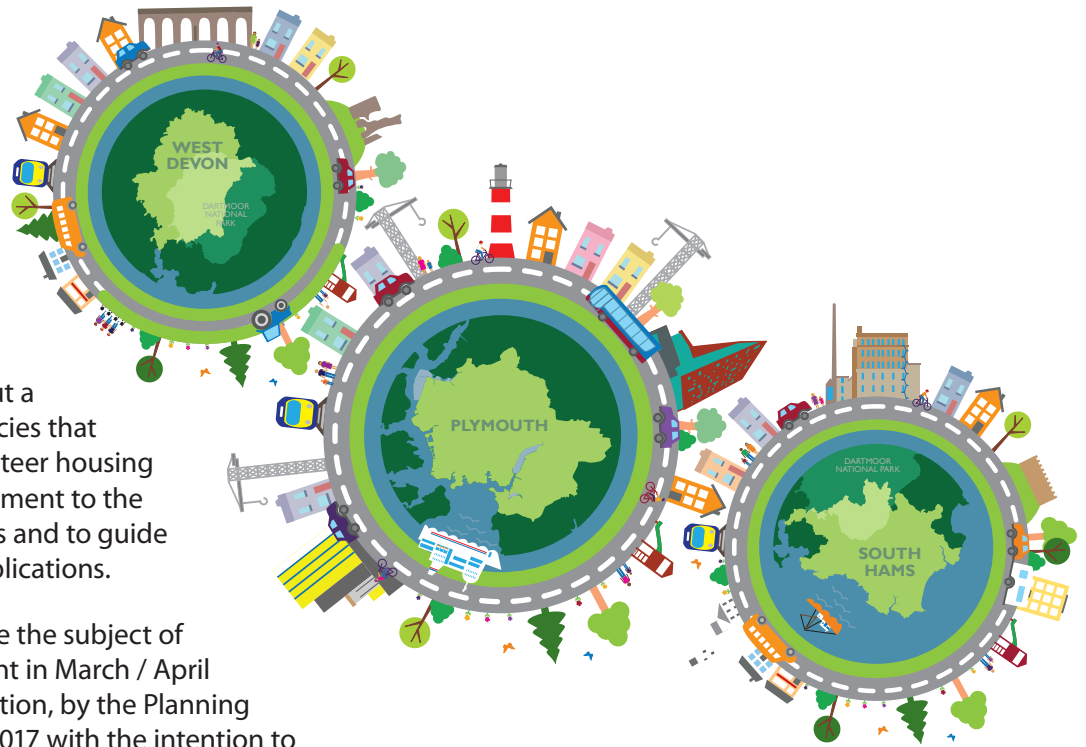
There is then a range of external policies and strategies which support the delivery of 'Our Plan' (e.g. Planning Policy Guidance, or Homelessness Strategy) helping the Council to deliver this vision. Underpinning these outward looking policies and strategies are internal policies and strategies to help us to deliver Our Plan (e.g. ITC policies, or agile working, or staff appraisals to help develop our workforce). The Council posts all of its strategies and policies, both internal and external, on its website.



Joint Local Plan

A key responsibility of the Council is to maintain an up to date development plan. The Joint Local Plan, prepared in conjunction with South Hams and Plymouth Councils sets out a strategy and detailed policies that establish a framework to steer housing and employment development to the most sustainable locations and to guide decisions on planning applications.

The Joint Local Plan will be the subject of a public engagement event in March / April 2017 ahead of an examination, by the Planning Inspectorate, in Autumn 2017 with the intention to adopt in the year 2017 / 2018.



Medium Term Financial Strategy

Looks at financial planning and management for a 5 year period. This helps us to develop a sustainable budget over the medium term. It incorporates key factors such as changes in Government funding, our spending plans, and the levels of savings we need to make to achieve a balanced budget.

The Asset Management Plan

Sets out the strategic direction for the Council both as a land owner and with respect to its asset portfolio. It is essential to have a long term plan, to facilitate day to day operational decisions. The key points of the plan are to:

- commence a limited programme of residential development
- grow the existing commercial portfolio of small starter units
- facilitate community use of assets if appropriate
- dispose of underperforming and nonstrategic assets for re-investment

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Achievements during 2016/17

HOMES – Enabling homes that meet the needs of all



Action	16/17 Progress
Implement a housing delivery programme	Planning consent granted for 229 affordable homes. In excess of £150,000 secured through the planning process for the delivery of affordable homes. Delivered over 30 new homes in partnership with developers and housing associations.
Homeless Strategy	Widely consulted and adopted on a 5 year homeless strategy setting out the Council's commitment to tackle the causes of homelessness.
Disabled facility grants	Awarded over £164,000 to 43 projects to facilitate independent living through adaptation of homes including level shower access, stair lifts and rails.
Affordable housing	£250,000 Community Led Housing funding awarded to encourage future homes the area. We will continue to work with existing and emerging groups to utilise this grant.

ECONOMY – Creating places for enterprise to thrive and business to grow



Action	16/17 Progress
Clarify and deliver an economic development programme	Agreed a programme for 2016-18 including a funded support package for start-up and growing businesses. Continued sub regional partnership delivery. Business database development and provision of business news bulletins.
Greater Dartmoor Local Enterprise Action Fund	Supported this fund to create jobs in the rural economy, 13 projects approved to date worth over £226,000 investment.
Heart of the South West Growth Deal 3	Further funding granted for targeting the final 5% of premises not benefitting from superfast broadband.
Town Benchmarking	Research conducted in both Tavistock and Okehampton to establish the economic health of each town with a view to informing future policy.
Better Business For All Partnership	Achieved a Federation of Small Businesses Award for work to this partnership including provision of advice and support to over 300 businesses during routine food inspections.
Council owned premises	Achieved over 90% occupancy rate for all Council owned commercial premises.

INFRASTRUCTURE – Securing the services and facilities that meet the needs of our communities



Action	16/17 Progress
Renew strategic infrastructure delivery plan	Plan prepared in consultation with strategic partners and infrastructure providers which seeks to ensure the timely delivery of: transport, highway infrastructure, education, community facilities and open space / formal play areas.
Waste Review	Future waste options considered to ensure service provision is in place for April 2017 when the current contractual arrangements expire. West Devon continues to be a leading recycling authority.
Grounds maintenance review	Secured a 2 year contract extension to ensure that grounds maintenance continues to a high standard with a minimal increase in costs.

COMMUNITIES – Empowering residents to create strong communities



Action	16/17 Progress
Produce Joint Local Plan	Conducted over 22 community engagement events to canvas local views on the proposed Joint Local Plan due to be adopted in late 2017.
Neighbourhood Parish Plan	1 new plan underway and continued support provided to 10 communities already developing plans.
Community Project Grants	Over £30,000 awarded to 10 projects for new play parks, parish noticeboards, community centre refurbishments and community safety projects.
Town and Parish (TAP) Funding	Over £51,000 awarded to 39 projects including air ambulance night landing sites, community transport and defibrillators.
Development Management Towns and Parish Meetings	Attendance at 10 parishes/town meetings to foster a better understanding of the planning process.
Developer Forum	Reinstated and held every 3 months, engaged with 30 agents/ developers to update on changes in planning process / legislation and problem solving.
BT Payphone Removal Consultation	Coordinated a consultation to ensure affected communities were well briefed to influence the future of payphones in their communities.
Implement a coordinated community support offer	Review of Partnership working arrangements including Community Safety Partnership, Citizens Advice and Community & Voluntary Service (CVS) to meet community needs.

WELLBEING – Supporting positive safe and healthy lifestyles



Action	16/17 Progress
Implement public health working group	Group established and focussed on coordinating health and wellbeing projects including Social Prescribing. 3 local GP surgeries engaged to date accessing over £46,000 funding.
Junior Life Skills	Worked with 7 partners including the Police, RNLI, Fire Service, BT and Western Power to present workshops to over 400 year 6 students on safety, wellbeing and responsible citizenship.
Complete and implement health and wellbeing procurement	Secured a 25 year contract with Fusion Lifestyle to run Council owned leisure facilities and provide capital improvements of £1.5 million including new health and fitness facilities at Meadowlands.
Community Sports Grants	Over £3,000 awarded to assist coaching and equipment for 7 projects including squash, triathlon, gymnastics and trampoline clubs.

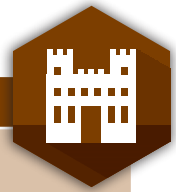
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ENVIRONMENT – Protecting, conserving and enhancing our built environment



Action	16/17 Progress
Support delivery of the agreed improvement programme for Tamar Valley AONB	Charity established to generate additional income including a Visitor Giving Scheme. Investigation underway in to the viability of a Conservation Board. Ongoing collaboration with partners to achieve efficiencies and attract external grant funding.
Dog fouling	Held roadshows in partnership with the Dogs Trust to raise the importance of responsible dog ownership.
Measures to support design quality	Policy established to encourage high quality design following guidelines requiring layout, materials and greenspace that integrate with the neighbourhood as well as pedestrian, cycling and public transport connectivity to existing facilities and design that promotes safety.

HERITAGE – Celebrating our past and protecting our heritage for the future



Action	16/17 Progress
Support World Heritage Site designation	The celebration of the 'tinth' (sic) anniversary of the WHS inscription was a notable success with The Man Engine launch bringing international media publicity to Tavistock. Marketing investment at the Tamar Trails has reaped dividends with an increase in footfall within the World Heritage site.
Tavistock Townscape Heritage Initiative	Contributed to this partnership initiative which to date has secured £130,000 Heritage Lottery Funding and seen the completion of Butchers Hall. Further building refurbishments and public realm enhancement planned for 2017.

RESOURCES – Promoting energy efficiency and more effective use of our natural resources



Action	16/17 Progress
Support community led energy conservation and generation	Support for Cosy Devon scheme – Local Energy Action Project signposting residents to free energy efficiency advice.
Solar Panels	Over 3014 kwh energy produced at Council offices

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Next Steps

The Council will continue to strive to deliver efficient services that meet the needs of its customers.

We will do this by improving our use of digital technology to offer more online transactions and make it quicker and easier to find information, request and pay for a service and improve the customer experience.

Our new awareness campaign for our digital services offer 'Do it online – Save time' will run throughout the year. We will focus on getting things right first time, telling customers what level of service they can expect and then aiming to meet and where possible exceed those expectations. We will develop the use of digital social media to complement existing customer communication to widen our engagement with customers getting information quickly and when it is needed.

The reduction of call volumes achieved this year will free up staff to become more proactive in engaging with customers who do not have access to our digital services and will allow us to develop services to meet their needs.

Save time
Do it Online

West Devon Borough Council

Apply for Benefit

Pay Council Tax

Report Fly Tipping

Apply, order, pay, report and stay informed.
Do it all from your phone, tablet or computer.

www.westdevon.gov.uk





Review of key services

In addition to focusing on delivery of services, we will focus on enforcement services, such as planning, environmental health, licensing and develop a more robust and equitable debt recovery process. As central government housing policy continues to develop, we will ensure that all elements of the Council that are involved with housing, from homelessness, housing benefit, to the private sector landlords, affordable homes to improving our planning service to speed up house building are brought together in a cohesive delivery plan.

We will be working with key stakeholders and current contractors to ensure that front line services continue to perform at a high level and can be developed in the future. Recycling, waste collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance services will all be market tested for quality, environmental suitability, cost and performance in the next 2 years. In the meantime we work closely with partners to improve on current services and get best value for money for residents.

There will continue to be a focus on environmental enforcement and our community offer to ensure that environmental offenders are prosecuted where possible and communities are supported by their Council in a variety of ways.

Partnership working

We will continue to develop our existing partnerships and create new ones to improve our support to individuals and communities, ensuring that we offer joined up services and customers have a clear understanding of where they can get guidance and support. Through the continued development of our Locality team we aim to make real difference on the ground, this could be through the design of local parking tariffs to encourage economic development or through enabling access to grants to support local initiatives.

Our financial future

With the withdrawal of Government funding we will need to generate additional income to be able to carry on delivering our current range of services. Over the course of the year we will be considering and implementing proposals to meet this financial challenge; these are likely to include developing investment opportunities and income generating services as well as finding further efficiencies and smarter ways of doing things.



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2017/18 Actions

WELLBEING

Supporting positive safe and healthy lifestyles

Explore the co-location of public services to ensure a holistic, co-ordinated approach to meet the wellbeing needs of the communities



HOMES

Enabling homes that meet the needs of all

Disabled facility grants for home adaptations

Housing projects to target empty homes, houses of multiple occupation and fuel poverty

- £1/4 million to deliver housing to meet the needs of local people
- Tenants incentive scheme to assist homeowners to downsize
- Funding to deliver 26 affordable homes



HERITAGE

Celebrating our past and protecting our heritage for the future

Continued commitment to Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site



ENVIRONMENT

Protecting, conserving and enhancing our built environment

Funding to the Tavistock Town Heritage Initiative



ECONOMY

Creating places for enterprise to thrive and business to grow

- Teenage Markets to encourage young entrepreneurs
- Business support funding
- Shaping a sub-regional productivity plan
- Job creation through the Greater Dartmoor LEAF programme



RESOURCES

Promoting energy efficiency and more effective use of our natural resources

Support community led energy conservation and generation projects and provide supportive planning policy



INFRASTRUCTURE

Securing the services and facilities that meet the needs of our communities

- Implement a revised emergency response and business continuity plan to support communities during emergencies
- Introduce paperless parking permits allowing for swifter service
- Waste and recycling efficiencies including in-cab technology for more efficient roadside collection



COMMUNITIES

Empowering residents to create strong communities

Village Hall Capital Grants over £36,000 available per annum for improvements and refurbishments







West Devon
Borough
Council

