

Division members report to Buckerell PC, 15th May 2024 - DCC Cllr
Phil Twiss

A few 'big ticket' items in this month's report which might not be obviously be related have a common themes of Devon County Council working with many other stakeholders to provide the best services and best value it can to all residents in Devon

DCC to receive additional funds to support households struggling with higher energy and food costs

Citizens Advice is reporting that average energy costs are as high as last winter for many households, and that despite energy prices falling this month, around 5.3 million people are currently living in households in debt to their energy supplier.

So, it's welcome news that we are able to confirm that Devon County Council have been allocated a little over £5 million from the government to help households struggling to pay higher bills for energy, food, water, and other essential items.

This will be the fifth round of Household Support Funding received from the Department for Work and Pensions, to run between April and September 2024. It will take Devon's total level of Household Support Funding received so far to just over £30 million.

The funding is to support households in most need, but specifically those that may not be eligible for other support that is already available from the government.

Plans must be submitted by mid-May to the Department of Work and Pensions, setting out how DCC, with Devon's District, City and Borough councils and other voluntary and community partners, will make the latest funding available.

Plans are likely to include:

- A specific funding allocation to support families in receipt of Free School Meals, to provide food vouchers that can be exchanged at supermarkets to buy food during school holidays. 21,700 children in Devon were eligible for free school meal vouchers during the last holidays
- Some funding will also go to provide financial support for food, energy and other essentials to eligible low income households with children and young people, through the County Council's Early Help service
- Team Devon's District/City/Borough councils will plan to continue helping households that are in greatest financial need and struggling to pay for food, energy and other related essentials. They will publicise further details soon, once plans have been finalised
- Citizens Advice Devon will continue to receive funding to support households that are using pre-payment and credit meters, to help with energy costs
- Devon Community Foundation will deploy funds to voluntary and community organisations that support specific groups who may struggle to access the help and support they need

Devon and Torbay Devolution Deal – Combined County Authority

The proposed deal will transfer significant decision-making powers and funding from Whitehall to Devon and Torbay, so that important decisions on local priorities, such as jobs and skills, housing, and the environment, can be made locally.

Following a wide ranging consultation, the proposal itself was met with a wide range of views both for and against, although unanimous support is not a prerequisite to moving forward.

One thing is clear; The ‘deal’ may have Devon County and Torbay Councils’ signatures on the paperwork, but for devolution to work well for the one million or so residents across Devon and Torbay, the task in hand will require all levels of local government across the two areas – County and Unitary, City, District and Borough, and Town and Parish councils – to work much more closely together.

It will also need the strong influence of advisory groups comprising experts in local industry and the voluntary sector, and geographically representing all parts of Devon and Torbay, working with the Devon and Torbay CCA.

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act as passed by Parliament makes county and unitary councils responsible for leading Combined County Authorities. The responsibility for leading this CCA therefore falls to democratically led representatives from Devon County Council and Torbay Council.

However, it is ‘critically important’ that Devon’s District councils have a voice in the Devon and Torbay CCA, and the ability to influence its work.

It is proposed that Devon’s City, District and Borough councils, the Devon Association of Local Councils representing Devon’s Town and Parish Councils, the County Council and the two National Park Authorities, will all sit as part of a formal ‘Team Devon’ Joint Committee to offer its collective voice in the CCA.

District councils and housing associations will also work with Torbay Council’s housing function and the CCA to accelerate delivery of more housing across Devon and Torbay.

District councils will also be involved in the formation of a joint strategic transport plan for Devon and Torbay so that land-use and housing plan areas align to transport plans and sustainable transport options.

In addition, advisory groups comprising representatives with experience and expertise in given fields, e.g. health, housing or climate change, will have a role in providing formal advice to the CCA. As will voluntary sector and social enterprise organisations, that will need to work closely with the CCA, making sure that decision-makers are responding to local interests and addressing local priorities.

Through Local Skills Improvement Plans, the proposed CCA will work with business and education leaders to create a stronger, joined-up relationship between employers and schools, colleges and universities to provide the skilled workforce the local economy needs for the future.

Do you have a scheme to benefit the community? Grants are available

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

This is the third year DCC have made funding available to support local schemes 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.

This could include offering advice, peer support or guidance on budgeting, cooking low-cost nutritional meals or supporting the recruitment, training and retention of Volunteers.

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.

For further information visit <https://www.devon.gov.uk/communities/growing-communities-fund>

ENDS