

**West Devon Borough Council Update - Cllr David Turnbull**

**Cost of Living Crisis – further update**

The government has made more money available to local councils to support households with the increasing cost of living during the autumn/winter period. The Council has been allocated £124,407 by Devon County Council and the funding must be spent during the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. The fund must be used to support households in the most need; particularly those who may not be eligible for other support government has recently made available but who are nevertheless in need.

The Council is proposing the following use of the Household Support Funding for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. • Making support payments of £650 to working age households receiving council tax reduction not receiving passported benefits on 1 December 2022. It is estimated that 16 households will benefit as a result. • Making support payments of £300 to households receiving council tax disabled band reduction on 1 December 2022. It is estimated that we will be able to support 192 households as a result. • Providing funding of £10,000 to help partners provide slow cookers and cookbooks, electric blankets, warm clothing and sleeping bags to individuals and households identified as being in need. • Using the balance of the funding to offer an open application process to provide support to low income households and others in financial need.

**Christmas Lights**

During Christmas I noticed that many Councillors (Including myself) contributed some of their localities monies toward this years cost of our lights. No hesitation on this point and I am sure if asked of again the same will apply.

**Council Support Ukraine Community**

West Devon Borough Council has hosted a fun-filled event for 150 Ukrainian guests, including 40 children who have moved to the Borough since the outbreak of war in the Ukraine earlier this year.

Held on Saturday 26 November at the Bedford Hotel, Tavistock, the Council brought the community together with the help of its dedicated Homes for Ukraine Support Officer, Tatiana Lytvynenko. Tatiana moved from Ukraine to Tavistock in April and has been a key member of the Council's Homes for Ukraine team helping to link with the guests living within the Borough.

The event brought together friends and families, new and old, who have had similar experiences and ordeals. In addition to West Devon Borough Council, Citizen Advice and the Council for Voluntary Service were also available to offer support, advice and information to help West Devon's newest residents settle in as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, the youngest members of the event were having a wonderful time being amused by the brilliant entertainers; Entertainingly Different, Cher's Funky Faces and Sciencedipity. Also joining in the fun were Council Leader, Neil Jory

**AUDITOR GIVES COUNCIL FINANCES A CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH**

West Devon Borough Council will be one of the first few Council's in Devon to have its Annual Accounts and Audit signed off. On Tuesday 22 November, West Devon Borough Council's Audit and Governance Committee met to approve the Council's Annual Accounts for 2021/22.

The Council has been given a clean bill of health by external auditors, Grant Thornton LLP, who have now issued an unqualified opinion on the Council's Accounts. Grant Thornton made specific reference to the high quality of the work and accounting records by the Council's finance team with very few adjustments to the draft accounts as a result of the audit. They stated that this reflects favourably in comparison to other Councils. This means the Council's financial statements were

properly prepared in accordance with the Accounting Code of Practice and give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council and its income and expenditure for the year.

There was praise too for the positive and constructive approach the Council made to the annual audit and inspection with audit queries being responded to in a quick and efficient manner. The audit work was completed through a hybrid approach, with a mixture of on-site and remote work during July to November, with a significant amount of time being invested by Council staff.

### **Over £1.1m in Funds Awarded to Support Business and Community**

West Devon Borough Council is set to receive £1m of UK Shared Prosperity Funds to deliver targeted business and community support programmes within the local area. The awards come from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The Council is using its funding within the Borough to achieve the most sustainable outcomes possible to support the Council's Climate Change and Biodiversity promise to become net-zero in the Borough by 2050.

By working closely with specialist organisations, businesses and community groups, the Council can improve sustainable travel infrastructure, begin to decarbonise a range of business sectors, and help our farming community to adopt innovative approaches to farming that are better for our climate and ecology.

The first step towards improvements is **Active and Inclusive Travel** through:

- programmes of activities to encourage people to use sustainable travel for their work and leisure activities, particularly making our tourism sites accessible through low carbon transport
- the development of a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, setting out and prioritising interventions to improve the local cycling and walking networks
- supporting the West Devon Transport Hub to enhance the active and inclusive travel infrastructure linking the new hub to the wider community and surrounding areas.

**Agriculture and Regenerative Farming** improvements will support the rural economy by:

- bringing research & development to our agricultural communities, turning them into a test bed for new technologies and processes so that they can lead the way in improving the national agricultural sector.
- supporting farms to transition to regenerative farming processes. Focusing focus on improving soil quality, moving away from pesticides and fertilisers, and improving biodiversity on their sites.
- supporting farms and food producers to get their products into local market places.

Across the Borough, the Council's specialist officers will be offering **Wider Business Decarbonisation Support and Consultancy** with:

- support for Community Energy Groups to help them bring projects forward and access funds to support their goals.
- support for village halls to strengthen the role they play in our most rural communities.
- delivery of decarbonisation plans for businesses, which will then be used to help them access grant support.
- work with the local construction sector and its supply chain to strengthen its ability to deliver decarbonised building projects.

