

Cllr Charlotte FitzGerald
November Report
EDDC – Budleigh & Raleigh
15 November 2023

Poverty Working Panel

I joined a quarterly videocall of the Poverty Working Panel and heard about the cross-disciplinary work of the council and with external partners to tackle issues arising from poverty in the district.

The call included presentations from East Devon District Council's Building Control department, its Benefits and Financial Resilience Team, and external partners, East Devon Citizens Advice, South West Water, and Exeter Community Energy (ECOE). The teams laid out how they are working to help residents of the district access practical and long-term support, including improving poor-quality housing, ensuring where applicable that residents were aware of all benefits available to them, tackling issues arising from the cost-of-living crisis and fuel poverty.

The Benefits and Financial Resilience Team outlined its touchpoints into the community, including through foodbanks and the other agencies present. It also highlighted the mental health support aspects of its function. I'm due to meet with this team next month to learn more about this in my capacity as the council's mental health member champion.

Building Control officers are sometimes the 'first responders' to pick up on undiagnosed mental health issues, as they visit homes of residents and witness problems with self-care, including hoarding. They are now trained to respond by offering referrals where there is a perceived need. The group inter-refer individuals and families for benefits advice and other financial resilience support where required. For example, an issue that might start with Building Control fixing a damp and mould problem in a home or could lead to a referral to Exeter Community Energy to look at installing home solar panels to improve affordable heating provision, or to the Benefits and Financial Resilience Team to ensure the resident was making the most of all financial support available.

East Devon Citizens Advice presented their involvement in debt advisory, which is significant and an important part of the anti-poverty support network in East Devon – again, they are also a source of referrals that the council might not catch automatically.

Finally, a representative of South West Water presented on its new customer hardship support initiatives, including debt relief funds.

I have since the meeting requested a flyer to be made available, with some key contacts.

Strategic Planning Committee

We now have a working timetable for work on the Emerging Local Plan (overleaf). This is a working document and will be reviewed monthly by the committee to ensure we remain on track to meet our objective of having an agreed plan ready for submission for inspection by summer 2025. From March onwards we anticipate a heavy workload and will probably be meeting twice a month to discuss each aspect of the plan in detail. The timetable refers only to the committee's work on the Emerging Local Plan: as previously, other items will emerge ad hoc that the committee will also need to consider as part of its regular meetings.

