

County Councillor's Annual Report 2021-22

This has been another strange and somewhat frustrating year. Originally, I was not intending to seek re-election to Devon County Council in May 2021. I had served 28 years and was conscious of my increasing age. However, I was finally persuaded to let my name go forward

Devon CC is still holding some of its meetings in the virtual mode and whilst this may save travelling time and the increasing expense of petrol, these meetings have become far too long and sometimes lack the focus of a meeting in person. A few weeks ago I took part in a meeting that started at 9.15 hours and ended at 13.35 hours. This was a strain on both the back and eye muscles!

In addition most of our officers have been encouraged to work from home. Over the last two years several senior officers have chosen to retire and working from home has not provided their replacements the opportunity to build up the kind of continuity needed for the good team work which has always been a strength of DCC. Councillors have found it has taken so much longer to resolve problems and get decisions to deal with quite important matters. This is probably most noticeable with regard to Highway matters. We have a very good relationship with our local Highway Neighbourhood Officer, Emma Stamp, and she has worked well with us to try and expedite some of our local concerns but the pandemic has created a large backlog of work, caused either by staff absence due to illness, or the unavailability of raw materials or equipment. Hopefully as we learn to "live with Covid" things will start to improve.

Devon CC continues to spend the largest part of its budget on Adult Social Care. I represent one of the largest wards for residents over 65 in the country. Littleham has a huge number of residential/nursing homes and an ever-increasing number of warden supported apartments. Working in Partnership, Seachange and Exmouth Hospital offer a good service in Primary Care but it is now apparent that the lockdowns have increased the need to support the degree of loneliness and dementia which is now apparent in our area. There was a considerable overspend on Adult Care last year and 2% of the increase in your DCC Council Tax is to address that.

Shandford was sold by auction in 2020 but it has taken Abbeyfield until quite recent times to pass the proceeds to the newly-formed local trust which will administer these funds. This Trust will provide financial assistance towards the cost of care and home care services, facilities and associated amenities and fund

the provision of residential care to support older persons of limited means in the Budleigh area.

I am delighted that we have been able to re-open the Information Bureau since the last lockdown. It has now returned to summer opening hours from 10.00 to 16.00 hours from Monday to Saturday. I am one of the willing volunteers and get a lot of satisfaction helping both the local residents and visitors who value the facility. They have recently launched their new website "Love Budleigh".

Our local library provides a popular and helpful service and is now back to its former opening hours. We are very grateful to the Friends of Budleigh Library for the support they give.

Devon CC has declared a climate emergency and is a founding member and principal funder of the Devon Climate Emergency Partnership. It intends to engage Devon's residents, businesses and visitors to develop a plan to achieve a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions across the area by 2050 at the latest. The next version of the Devon Carbon Plan will be available for adoption from August 2022.

Most of the issues in East Budleigh have been about Highway matters. I applied for a speed reduction from Brick Cross to Otterton and was turned down because they said it was a rural road. There was a nasty accident there last week which has been recorded and Emma Stamp and I visited the residents of Sleep Cottage to discuss speed problems. Emma has promised them a 24/7 day check towards the end of June. We also had the fatal accident on Oak/Budleigh Hill. Hopefully the Bicton students are now driving more sensibly. The blocked drains and flooding on Budleigh Hill have now been cleared and repaired.

Drake's Primary School is well-attended. Year 6 have recently sat their SATs exams. They have also just enjoyed a trip to Pixie's Holt on Dartmoor.

I would like to thank our three District Councillors, Judith Venning and East Budleigh Parish Council for all their help and support.

Christine