

County Council Report – July - Cllr Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin

It's been an extremely busy couple of months since being elected as your County Councillor, especially with the added responsibility of being Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs! This appears to have an extremely wide remit... A huge amount of work involved but I am hoping it will give me the opportunity to have a really positive impact on the council and it will allow me to have a much stronger voice for our communities up here in Torridge and North Devon, which as we know are extremely rural and isolated and are so often forgotten about in favour of urban areas such as Exeter and the Southern half of Devon...

At our first full council meeting and AGM, as well as voting for our leaders and chairs, we also voted to install “swift boxes” to some of DCC’s buildings, a small decision to make and a quick and easy way to protect this declining species, and we will be lobbying central government to require all new-builds to install “swift bricks” as standard.

At our first cabinet meeting we heard about plans to improve support for local foster carers and agreed to bring allowances in line with national levels, reduce council tax charges for registered foster carers in line with neighbouring authorities, and we also introduced an “equipment fund” to provide carers with equipment such as new mattresses, buggies and car seats. We hope this will show how much we value our foster carers and the important job they do, and help to increase retention rates across Devon.

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I have had lots of informal meetings too, including some training, and briefings on a wide range of issues affecting the county, from Broadband to Childcare provision. Luckily most of these meetings can take place online so I haven't had to travel to Exeter too much!

You will be pleased to hear I also spent a day travelling throughout Torrington Rural in the Highways van with our Neighbourhood Highways Officer. We were looking at the state of our roads, and I was learning about different methods and processes and finding out about what has been prioritised for future work. As well as this, it was the opportunity for me to highlight the many roads and areas that have been raised with me by local residents in the past few months. We will be heading out again next week as we were unable to look at everything in one day!

I attended the public meeting in the pannier market from Torrington Regeneration Board to find out what has been happening and some of their planned projects. They have created a new website for the town, building on the original OneGreatTorrington website that was set up 5 years ago. This website has new branding and will be updated regularly to show all of the local events taking place etc. I was particularly interested to find out about the Tarka the Otter Trail initiative which will involve a number of sculptures across Great Torrington and the Commons, and a dedicated storybook linking to the trail. The regeneration board is looking for people to join them, so if you would like to join or have any ideas for the town please email great-torrington@torridge.gov.uk

As your county councillor I now have £8000 available through the locality budget! Very exciting and I have already allocated a lot of it! This can be used for projects that will benefit the local community. Please get in touch with me first if you are interested in applying. The application form is very simple and can be found on the Devon County website here:

<https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.devon.gov.uk%2Fdem>

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I was really pleased to be invited to the Friends of Great Torrington Library's AGM and to hear from their guest speaker Alex Kittow, Chief Executive of Libraries Unlimited. I heard about the numerous craft events, message in a bottle, bounce and rhyme, walk and talk, plans for a repair café, and being the only place to print in Great Torrington. The friends have raised £1500 from book sales and do such a fab job volunteering at the library. Summer '25 has a new reading scheme with an underwater adventure theme, launching 12th July! The importance of the summer reading challenge was really emphasised, and I learned that children drop two reading levels at school if they don't read over the summer holidays! There was a reminder too that libraries are a charity. Libraries Unlimited run 54 libraries across Devon, have 2.3million visits, and receive help from more than 700 volunteers offering more than 24,000 volunteer hours (including teenagers doing their Duke of Edinburgh Award!). Yes reading is a tool to increase life chances. But libraries are much more than a place to borrow books. The slogan for Libraries Unlimited is "Enriching lives, building communities", they are a community hub where everyone is welcome and libraries are for everybody. And in terms of looking after the environment, libraries are the ultimate form of recycling. Why buy when you can borrow?

On a wider issue, I was shocked to hear on the news about the plans to phase out fire service co-responders across the Southwest, and the decision to move solely to volunteer community first responders. I put out a response on the same day, and have written to the Southwest Ambulance Trust seeking information and answers to find out the detail, their reasoning, and whether their plans can be reconsidered.

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The trust has also been called in for scrutiny by Devon County Council's Health and Adult Care Scrutiny committee which will be held 14th July at County Hall. The deadline for questions and public speaking is this Thursday 10th July.

At our most recent cabinet meeting we presented a large number of reports which have all been reported on the DCC website. Most notable decisions included the agreement "to trial pothole repair blitz as part of £83 million road maintenance programme" Our highways teams will carry out a repair blitz on potholes, where all potholes would be filled, rather than just dealing with safety defects, in a few trial areas of the county. Although the exact details are still to be agreed, this pilot would be used to establish the budget implications of changing maintenance procedures.

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And we also agreed to “Improve the outcomes of our most vulnerable children through new 10-year plan “A new long-term plan to improve the outcomes of Devon’s most vulnerable young people by overhauling how they are supported and cared for has been approved by our cabinet. Councillors have agreed to an ambitious multi-million investment programme to establish 12 new children’s homes; 20 specialist foster places; and up to four new therapeutic schools, over the next 10 years.

<https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.devon.gov.uk%2Fchildren-families-education%2Fnews%2Fnew-cabinet-vows-to-improve-the-outcomes-of-our-most-vulnerable-children-through-10-year-plan%2F&data=05%7C02%7CCheryl.Cottle-Hunkin%40devon.gov.uk%7C8395dcc017dc4b3e62a708ddbecf3f22%7C8da13783cb68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638876519496607151%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMilslkFOljoitWFPbClldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=fOZfXZDcXYZhWwv0rTArN8on2xZaqQP%2F9IQnsvwc3W0%3D&reserved=0>

Last week I was really pleased to visit a place where I have spent a huge amount of time in the past- both as a pupil and as a teacher! Great Torrington School. I want to thank headteacher Andy Bloodworth and chair of governors Ian Newberry for inviting me in, in my new role as County Councillor. They showed me around and I heard about the challenges and things that have changed since I was there 6 years ago. A big thing that I took away was the will and the need for more collaboration between Devon County Council and the school and that is one of the things I will be working on over the next few years.

Also last week, as county councillors we were all invited down to a farm near Ivybridge. This was organised by the NFU South team, helping to build relationships and was a great opportunity for councillors to learn about the issues and especially the recent challenges we are facing in the farming sector. The family farm tax, the closure of the sustainable farming incentive, and unfair trade deals to name a few. As well as a presentation from the NFU and having a tour of the farm, we also heard from the Rural Affairs team at Devon & Cornwall Police about the different challenges in rural areas- from flocks of more than 100 sheep being stolen overnight, to GPS systems being stolen and ending up as far away as the USA and Mexico. These are highly organised crimes and we were urged to report any suspicious behaviour that we see in the countryside to them. As cabinet member for Rural Affairs I look forward to working together with organisations such as the NFU - National Farmers' Union, sharing knowledge and information with fellow councillors, and helping us to make informed decisions, allowing Devon County Council to be a bigger voice for our rural communities.

Finally... PLEASE can I ask you to consider supporting The Globe Hotel community project in Great Torrington. They held a well-attended public meeting Saturday 14th June and they are well on their way to purchasing the building. I believe there is currently around £150,000 raised but the goal they need to reach is £230,000. Luckily they have been able to extend the deadline to raise the money, the final deadline is now 18th August. Once the amount is raised the hotel will be owned by the community and a grant of more than half a million pounds will be released by central government towards its renovation. The aim of the globe project is to provide a training hotel to train young people in the hospitality sector. It would raise aspirations and would transform our town centre. Wouldn't it be great to have a hotel right next door to our Plough Arts Centre! Community shares start at just £50. Please spread the word with everyone and encourage them to invest. Link to crowdfunder here:

<https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.crowdfunder.co.uk%2Ffp%2Fthe-globe-hotel-torrington%23start&data=05%7C02%7CCheryl.Cottle-Hunkin%40devon.gov.uk%7C8395dcc017dc4b3e62a708ddbecf3f22%7C8da13783cb68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638876519496623162%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMilslkFOljoitWFPbClldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=toTi%2FXFM6TOh5inJB1vWKPYOPSttTtXwbQVKKuWmyqM%3D&reserved=0>

District Council Report – Councillor Chris Wheatley

Torridge District Council - Local Government Reorganisation

Torridge District Council would like the community to be aware and have a voice towards the next stage towards Local Government Reorganisation. We are being asked by government to develop plans to move from a two-tier system to a single-tier unitary authority. North Devon and Torridge have been working councils across Devon to work up proposals and in March 2025 an interim plan was submitted to government on behalf of all Devon's district councils except Exeter.

The proposal was known as the 1-4-5 Plan, keeping Plymouth as a standalone unitary authority, Forming another unitary authority with South Hams, Teignbridge, West Devon, and Torbay. Creating a new unitary authority combining East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon, Torridge, and Exeter.

Final proposals will be submitted in November 2025. Though before then, the council would like to hear from residents, businesses, local communities and help identify what matters most to you?

This would ensure our proposals in November 2025 will help play a vital role in shaping our future. Torridge residents can complete the survey online on the **Let's Talk website** or alternatively if you require a large print or paper version you can request this by emailing

customer.services@torridge.gov.uk or calling **01237 428700** option 9

Paper copies are available at Riverbank House, Bideford, EX39 2QG

Community and Resources-

Household Support Fund 7

£302,310.00 inclusive of 12% for administration of Household Support Fund 7 has been allocated by Devon Council to Torridge District Council to help those people in financial hardship, typically those people currently in receipt of benefits. This is for period 1st April 2025 until 31st March 2026. Encompass are assisting TDC with reviewing applications. This was voted for unanimous.

Cllr Chris Bright Notice of Motion - The Plough Arts Centre

The exceptional reward of £45,000 of exceptional funding assistance to be approved and delivered in two payments of £22,500 (one in financial year 2025/2026 and one in April for financial year 2026/2027). Over the next 2 years the Plough Arts Centres will report twice a year to External Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Lead member Cllr Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin and Ward member Cllr Chris Bright spoke very positively regarding the importance of The Plough to the community and working with a renovated Globe Hotel.

Members voted for 11 and 1 against with no abstentions. Torrington Town Council to provide £15,000 bringing the total to £65,000.

The Globe Hotel community project in Great Torrington

Please support and help spread the word for The Globe Hotel community project in Great Torrington who need to reach £230,000, for the Globe Hotel Torrington crowdfunding project. As of today £162,295, has been raised and if we achieve the target the hotel will be owned by the community and over half a million pounds would be released by central government towards its renovation. The aim of the globe project is to provide a training hotel to train young people in the hospitality and catering sectors. The Globe next door to the Plough would work incredibly well together and offer much potential and benefit the community and further afield!

Loan Request for ARC Atlantic Racquet Club) - Caddesdown Bideford

A LOAN OF £100,000 to the Atlantic Raquet Centre to be repaid over 10 years with terms to be recommended by Full Council for completion of phase 6 development. Currently there are 5,500 users per week of the ARC and its many facilities. Voted for unanimously by members.

Torridge Estuary Strategy 2025-2030

The estuary strategy is to be adopted and that the 1-year action plan be submitted to members by January 2026 to ensure delivery of key actions within the adopted strategy.

Voted for unanimously.