

Good evening.

Closure-threatened community hospitals in Devon should be used as health and wellbeing centres for local people, the county council told the NHS. Redundant community hospital buildings should be converted to health and wellbeing centres where it is appropriate.

It was felt that looking after people as close to home as possible is the right thing to do after there was cross-party support for a notice of motion to Devon County Council welcoming Health Secretary Matthew Hancock's commitment to community hospitals. He said "the era of blindly, invariably closing community hospitals is over".

Councillors agreed that the county council should work closely with the NHS to influence decision-making and ensure any community hospitals that were closed should be used as health centres for local people where appropriate.

As you know I sit on the County Farms Estate Committee and we have been asking aspiring farmers to explore four soon-to-be vacant farms on the County Council's estate this month.

The holdings, which will be available to rent from March 2019 on a seven-year Farm Business Tenancy. They include:

Ten Oaks Farm, Roborough, Winkleigh

A residential starter dairy farm extending to 37.82 ha (93.48 ac)

Furze Cottages Farm, Ashreigney, Chulmleigh

A residential starter mixed livestock farm extending to 42.51 ha (105.08 acres) with an optional additional 30.56 ha (75.60 acres)

Churchlands Farm, Cadeleigh Park, Ivybridge

A residential starter mixed farm extending to 15.05 ha (37.19 acres)

Fairfield Farm, Denbury, Newton Abbot

A residential starter dairy farm extending to 51.72 hectares (127.81 acres)

Libraries Unlimited, the charity responsible for running Devon and Torbay's library service, has been named as one of the 50 most radical thinking organisations changing the UK for the better.

New Radicals is a search led by Nesta (the innovation foundation) and The Observer to find the top people, projects and organisations offering innovative ways to tackle social challenges. The winners being selected by a panel of independent and high-profile judges as well as Geoff Mulgan, Chief Executive of Nesta and Jane Ferguson, Editor of the Observer New Review.

Libraries Unlimited 'spun-out' from Devon County Council in April 2016 and is one of only four public service mutual library services across the country. In less than 3 years, the charity has opened four new libraries, a state-of-the-art FabLab (a digital making space) and Business and Intellectual Property Centre, won the contract to deliver Torbay Libraries on behalf of Torbay Council and been shortlisted for the 2018 Charity Awards.

Libraries Unlimited is also one of six library sector organisations to become an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation this year, bringing additional funding to Devon's libraries to provide high-quality arts and cultural activity across the county.

At my Scrutiny Committee three weeks ago we commended the organisation for increasing footfall in our Libraries but expressed grave concern at the reduction in book issues. We asked Cabinet to add two important Key Performance indicators that LU should report to – stock issues to children and professional hours worked by LU staff.

The County Council has been awarded £1m of EU funding to help deliver a range of energy projects which will boost Devon's low carbon energy sector and reduce its carbon footprint. The money is Devon's slice of £3m of funding from the European Local Energy Assistance (ELENA) initiative.

The three-year programme will consist of a series of energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable transport and heat networks projects across the region. In Devon this includes reducing the running costs of 55,000 street lights by cutting the amount of energy they use by around 60 per cent. Other projects include installing solar arrays on public buildings to reduce costs and making them more energy efficient, new cycle paths for commuters and increasing the number of electric vehicle charge points in Devon.

Next week is Responsible Gambling Week and a Report I put before Cabinet earlier this month on Problem Gambling has now become policy, part of which is to promote Responsible Gambling Week. Although much of the work that Councillors do is in Committee, often it is helpful to sit down around a table and discuss a controversial topic without the trappings of a formal committee. To this end seventeen people joined me in August at County Hall to discuss Problem Gambling in Devon and what measures we could take to treat this addiction.

We heard from the Gambling Commission Area Manager about how he worked with District and City Council colleagues to ensure that the various laws that govern the gambling industry were enforced and they in turn explained that all premises where gambling took place were closely monitored. We were told that there were about 5,400 problem gamblers in the County and heard the effects their gambling had on their health, their family, their employers and business colleagues. The Chief Executive of GamCare - the body set up by government - explained how people with a gambling problem can be helped and how few problem gamblers receive help by comparison with those suffering from alcoholism. A Police Inspector outlined their responsibilities and the Deputy Director of Public Health explained the mental processes that drive people towards this addiction. Our final witness was a County Councillor who movingly explained the consequences of his addiction and its devastating effect on his family and how he finally conquered his addiction.

After much discussion we identified four recommendations that were pertinent to County and District Colleagues, the Police and the NHS. The recommendations included: training front line staff to recognise the warning signs associated with problem gambling; to work with the Coroner's Office to identify gambling as a diagnosable mental health condition and ensure that suicide associated with gambling is recorded as such; that we should ask government to ban the use of credit cards in on-line gambling and that we should raise awareness of GamCare and identify and promote services that offer help for people and families who are suffering from the effects of problem gambling. Our report can be found here

<https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/documents/s20955/Gambling%20report.pdf>