

The award winning £110m South Devon Highway project is finally coming to an end. The project opened to traffic last December and with the exception of some additional work involving earth moving and landscaping the project is now all but complete. The next major project to affect this District will be the £28.5m scheme to improve the A382 between Newton Abbot and Drumbridges – this should come to Development Management in the early autumn. The project involves straightening the road, two roundabouts at Whitehills and Forches Cross, a pavement and cycle lane, a bridge at Forches Cross and a new link road from the hospital to Forches Cross.

Ofsted, in an unannounced inspection last year of Devon's Children's Services judged them as "Requiring Improvement" – this is actually an improvement on the last Inspection which declared them "Inadequate". The Report declared that children who need help and protection services were requiring improvement, Adoption services were rated Good, Care Leavers were rated "Inadequate" – (the Council had lost touch with Care Leavers within a year) and most worryingly of all the Leadership and Management of the Service was declared "Requires Improvement". As part of my work of the People Scrutiny Committee we have set up a Children's Services Standing Committee and I am involved in closely monitoring the whole of the Service with a remit to expect and require the best practice from the whole of the Service. I have been on task groups who have specifically reported on Child Sexual Abuse, Care Leavers and School Exclusions.

As you know I visit the Atkinson Secure Children's Home on a monthly basis and after a huge amount of lobbying and many reports I am pleased that we have secured a large investment in the grounds of the home, with play equipment, an all-weather running track, additional security fences, improvements to the Forest School and greatly improved children's bedrooms. I have received a commitment to improve the staff areas of the home and after lobbying from all involved in the Home we have secured a seven figure commitment from the DfE for major improvements to the buildings. I heard last week that a new school regime will start in September with a maximum of three week holidays - something I have long advocated – these teenagers have almost always been absent from school during their lives and the intensive work done by the school is truly amazing.

The prospectus for the HOTSW Devolution Agreement was submitted to Central Government at the end of February. At Council I described it as a document that has a complete paucity of ambition. I believe it will lead to additional layers of bureaucracy with a combined Authority and probably a Regional Mayor as well! And being highly parochial there is no mention of Teignbridge at all and nothing for small businesses – the backbone of our South West economy. Although I passionately support the devolution of power I cannot support this proposal for poor quality jobs, yet more houses, the Hinkley Point Chinese/French Nuclear power station and a greater concentration of jobs in the Exeter area. We all await the outcome of negotiations with the Minister.

Not to be outdone by the Chancellor's recent "U" turns County Council leader John Hart "U" turned on plans to ask schools to pay for their own lollipop men and women.

The authority had planned to save £250,000 out of the service cost of £350,000 as part of its £26 million budget cuts for 2016/17. This meant that the patrols would go but the administrators who controlled them would stay! However Lib Dems asked how Cllr Hart intended to pay for the service considering his comments that there was "no more money" only thirteen days previously. The answer was simple, just as they have dealt with the £8m+ cost overruns on Children's Services they will simply take the money from Reserves.

Finally after two pre-Budget scrutiny meetings, with recommendations to Cabinet about concern at the continuing scale of budget reductions, we set a Budget.

So after a four and a half hour debate the Council confirmed that the final tally was a requirement Budget of £335.553m being an increase of £18.422 m on the previous year – this is topped up by

Grants of £575.029m. This will be spread over 277,846 Band “D” properties with an average collection rate of 98.13%. This comes down to £1,207.62 per Band D property.

With my Locality Budget I disbursed the following :-

£1,000.00	Abb Talk for Computers
£400.00	Abbpast book publishing
£1,103.00	Defibruliser for Abbotskerswell
£600.00	Denbury Allotments Legal Aid
£500.00	Ipplepen Cricket Club
£455.00	Devon Finds Liaison Office
£723.00	Defibruliser for Ipplepen
£536.00	Ipplepen Football Club
£180.00	Kingskerswell Natural History Society Tools
£2,000.00	Kingskerswell Community Centre Curtains
£250.00	Kingskerswell Under 9s Football Kit
£1,103.00	Defibruliser for Kingskerswell
£500.00	Kingskerswell Scouts tents
£1,000.00	HITS Food Bank
£1,200.00	NA Community Transport to help start a local “Village” service
£400.00	NACT for Wheelchairs