

The prospectus for the HOTSW Devolution Agreement has now been published and will form the basis of a submission to Central Government at the end of this month. We will be debating this at Teignbridge and County later in the month but I cannot see myself moving from my position at the recent Teignbridge Council meeting where I described it as a document that has a complete paucity of ambition – if I was the Minister I would ask why Councils are not doing this already! It will lead to additional layers of bureaucracy with a combined Authority and probably a Mayor as well – there is nothing about democracy in the document at all. And being highly parochial there is no mention of Teignbridge at all and nothing for small businesses – the backbone of our South West economy. Sadly although I passionately support the devolution of power down through all levels of government I do not think I will be able to support this proposal for poor quality jobs, yet more houses, the Hinkley Point Chinese Nuclear power station and a greater concentration of jobs in the Exeter area when it comes before us.

Fostering Devon, Devon County Council's fostering service, has launched a new recruitment drive to increase the number of foster carers to look after children aged from 0 – 18, including sibling groups, those with disabilities and those with complex and challenging behaviour to help ensure these children receive the best start in life. The more carers, the better the chances of finding a good match, with the right home in the right location. Devon County Council is responsible for over 700 children and young people in foster care, and that figure continues to rise. In addition, each year a number of foster carers retire or leave the profession, meaning that there is always a need to recruit new carers.

Fostering Devon have launched their new recruitment campaign, asking people if they can 'foster the thought' about becoming a foster carer this year. The campaign uses a short film to express a series of common thoughts potential foster carers may have, including; 'it would be a challenge but we can handle that', 'we have a spare room that they can call their own', 'with the pay available, I can afford to do it full time'.

Finally we have held two pre Budget scrutiny meetings, with our final meeting recommending to Cabinet, concern at the continuing scale of reductions being imposed on local authorities and that we continue to press Government for a fairer allocation for Devon. Also that the strongest possible representations be made, publicly, to Government both direct and through MPs and the Local Government Association over its failure to provide Councils with full details of the local government finance settlement in good time. My Group also put forward a Motion to invite all Devon MPs to come to Council for a two hour masterclass on the consequential cuts to public services from this Budget on Budget day, the 16<sup>th</sup> February. Sadly although many colleagues from across the political spectrum spoke in favour the motion was defeated.

After a four and a half hour marathon Budget debate the Council confirmed that an extra £8.4 m from central government will be spent on services in Devon next year - an extra £5 million will go into strengthening resilience in social care for elderly and vulnerable people. £1.5 million will be set aside to fund the county's response to severe storms – the Belwin Fund ie put into reserves - with an extra £1 million spent on highways drainage and safety defects. And £1 million will be set aside to fund public health and more efficient and cost-effective working using new technology. Fortunately £40,000 was found to support the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Of course no mention was made of the Schools Crossings Service where the Council proposes to save £250k out of the total cost of £350k for the service – so the Lollipop patrols will go but the County Hall Administrators will stay! However my Group have called the decision in and it will be debated yet again next Monday at Place Scrutiny.

So 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% - slightly less than the 99% collection rate in Teignbridge. This comes down to £1,207.62 per Band D property.