

County Councillor's Report 30th October – Abbotskerswell & Kingskerswell

Devon are going to dispose of, or re-purpose, some of the properties and land considered surplus to requirements, in order to reduce costs and become a stronger and more sustainable council.

Members of the Cabinet were asked to back plans that will see the disposal of some of the properties we own, including the prestigious former Judges Lodgings, Larkebeare House, Exeter.

Other properties considered surplus to our requirements include: Compass House, Exeter, currently used by Devon Partnership NHS Trust; Ivybank, Exeter, office space used by one of our services; Land adjacent to County Hall in Matford Lane; St Georges Road Youth Centre, Barnstaple and Pottington Industrial Unit, Barnstaple.

The Council are currently responsible for properties with estimated annual running costs of around £8 million, and a maintenance liability in excess of £20 million, excluding schools. They own, lease or occupy in excess of 1,000 assets (buildings or parcels of land), including 364 schools; 500 land assets; 65 farms and around 300 operational buildings, including offices, children's centres, youth centres, recycling centres, day centres, respite centres, and contact centres.

It has been identified that since the pandemic, many of our staff, like employees everywhere, have adopted a hybrid model of working, dividing their time between working from an office and from home. And on average that our offices are only 20 to 30 percent occupied each day.

We have already made moves to reduce our expenditure, looking to lease out office space in the recently refurbished Lucombe House at County Hall.

It's thought that the sale of property and land could generate capital receipts of around £6 to £10 million, depending on planning approval, and reduce revenue costs by around £300,000 per year. It will also avoid backlog maintenance costs of around £3 to 5 million.

This Halloween, 30.4 million pumpkins will be bought for carving and, of these, a whopping 15.8 million pumpkins will go to waste, left uneaten. That's £26.7 million worth of edible food! (Hubbub, 2023) Studies have found that 3 in 5 people (60%) know you can eat your carving pumpkin, but only 1 in 9 of us always do. (Hubbub, 2023)

In true Halloween style, the guts, skin and innards of carved pumpkins can be put to good use to create tasty soups, stews, curries and much more. If you'd like to try different pumpkin recipes, take a look at Hubbub's 'Eat Your Pumpkin' recipe book, which features a selection of mouth-watering recipes such as pumpkin and feta rolls, pumpkin and coconut cake, Thai pumpkin soup and pumpkin seed pesto. Recipes at <https://www.recycledevon.org/pumpkin-rescue>

Once Halloween is over, don't forget to compost your pumpkin at home or recycle it in your food waste collection bin.

Thousands of Devon residents who are struggling with the cost of living can get extra support this winter. Earlier this year DCC secured £10m from the fourth round of the Government's Household Support Fund to cover the period from April 2023 until March 2024

The money comes with conditions on how it can be allocated and is to support households in most need – those that are struggling to pay for food, energy, water bills and other related essentials. It is also intended for those that may not be eligible for other government support.

So far under this fourth round of the scheme, we've deployed over £5 million supporting more than 38,000 households across Devon.

And now with winter approaching, Devon are working with our Team Devon partners (district and city councils) and other community organisations to provide the most vulnerable residents with rapid short-term financial support.

The homeless, low income families, those who are suffering from ill health and ethnic minorities are just some of the many groups who will benefit from schemes including free school meal holiday vouchers, hardship payments, pre-payment and credit energy meter support, community grants and funding for minor energy efficiency measures.

We're also working with the Devon Community Foundation to provide grants to voluntary sector organisations supporting communities that don't always get the help they need. Their 'Food, Fuel and More' grant scheme was well received this year and will re-open this winter.

The scheme will offer large grants of up to £25,000 to organisations that support homeless people or people in temporary or insecure housing. Groups supporting households with disabled residents or those suffering ill-health which has a direct impact on household income and an ability to meet food and energy bills, are also encouraged to apply, along with organisations that support Asian, black, traveller, Gypsy, Roma and ethnic minority communities who are not accessing support through other channels. They will also be operating a small grants scheme of up to £2,000 for smaller community initiatives.

A record funding award for Bikeability cycle training in Devon means that more than 11,000 children will be able to improve their skills on two wheels next year. The grant of just over £484,000 for 2024/25 is the highest amount Devon have ever received for Bikeability in the 17 years we've been delivering it.

Earlier this year Devon achieved the milestone of 100,000 Bikeability trainees. It was also named among the top ten local authorities for providing Bikeability for Year Six school pupils, with figures from the Bikeability Trust showing that more than 8,500 or 71% of Year Six pupils across the county were trained between April 2022 and March 2023.

Alistair Dewhirst - alistair.dewhirst@devon.gov.uk / Tel 07836 704127