

Report from your District Councillors

January 2025

Local Government Funding

In the week before Christmas the Council received the details of the 2025/26 Local Government Funding Settlement. Comparing all of the different funding streams, the Council has about £300,000 less funding than previously envisaged in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. This is mainly due to the loss of the Rural Services Delivery Grant which used to be around £0.5m, although this has been partly offset by a higher allocation of New Homes Bonus (NHB) funding. We were expecting around £0.7m in NHB and we will receive £0.9m. This loss of funding will have to be made up from within the Council's budget.

Local Government Reorganisation

SHDC Resolution 6/1/25

Following the publication of the Devolution White Paper, and subsequent statements by the leader of Devon County Council, South Hams District Council does not support the creation of one unitary council for Devon including Torbay.

Devon and Torbay are diverse and made up of over 970,000 residents across urban, suburban, and rural areas. Any reform of local government in Devon and Torbay should follow a period of proper consultation with residents, businesses, elected representatives and stakeholders. Looking at the evidence, all councils should decide collectively what is best for Devon and Torbay. A single unitary council for Devon and Torbay risks diminishing local representation with decision-making that is remote from the communities it purports to serve.

South Hams District Council does not support postponing the county council elections scheduled for May 2025. The government has indicated that this will only happen in priority areas that have clear and agreed plans. This is not the case in Devon and Torbay and in consequence this area cannot be in the first phase of these reforms.

South Hams District Council recognises that the government's white paper sets a clear direction of travel. It is proposed that all Devon and Torbay councils work collaboratively to agree how best to respond. Any changes must be carefully considered, transparent, and inclusive, ensuring that residents and businesses are fully engaged in shaping the future governance of Devon and Torbay.

The objective must be to get this right for our residents and businesses. That cannot be achieved if rushed decisions have not been given the serious consideration they deserve.

As such this Council strongly opposes the Government's current proposals, as set out in its White Paper, which would result in the abolition or merger of SHDC without full consultation and support by residents. We note the following:

- The Government has no mandate for abolishing district councils as this was not included in the Labour election manifesto
- There is little evidence that merging rural councils will result in financial savings as many unitary councils are in debt or suffering financial difficulties
- Devon CC has a budget of £1.837bn in 2024-25, an increase of £127m compared to a year earlier. The total budget of SHDC is minor in comparison.
- Any merger that abolishes SHDC will reduce democratic representation and move decision making away from local people.

Therefore, while we welcome the stated Government objectives of devolving power to regions and local communities, and getting councils back on their feet with long-term settlements, the proposed plan for a unitary council will not achieve this but instead will:

- Divert resources and funds to restructuring at a time when services are already stretched
- Lead to a reduction in the quality of services where SHDC currently operates, such as leisure centres, public toilets, waste collection, sustainable communities, planning and local housing, environmental protection, parks and open spaces, etc. - due to inevitable financial pressures on any future unitary council
- Lead to a reduction of local democracy, fewer public representatives and less support for local people who need it

Therefore the Council :

1. mandates the Leader to write to the Government on its behalf outlining this Council's concerns, with all related correspondence being copied to the wider membership, for their information and reference only.
2. supports the joint statement issued by the leaders of the eight district councils throughout Devon, that includes not supporting:
 - a. a Single Unitary Council for Devon; and
 - b. the postponement of the County Council elections in May 2025
3. will widely consult with its residents, businesses, community organisations and town and parish councils once a firm reorganisation proposal is ready for consideration.

Separate recorded votes were taken on Points 2 a and b

- a. Carried unanimously
- b. 21 for, 2 abstentions

Overall resolution carried unanimously

Launch of South Brent Community Woodland

On January 6th South Brent Community Woodland was launched with a community planting day. Two and a half thousand trees were planted by hundreds of residents in less than to

hours. The 64 acre site will continue to be planted over the next year and there are plans for further publicly open planting sessions.

Car parking app changing

Please be aware that the cashless parking app contract with our current supplier RingGo for the South Hams will finish at midnight on 11 January 2025.

Following a procurement process the new contract will start on 12 January with PayByPhone.

PayByPhone is one of the biggest suppliers of mobile parking payments in the UK. It already operates in some car parks in Devon and is the current provider for Somerset Council, amongst many others.



After Christmas, signs will be going up in our car parks, asking our customers to download the new app ready for the switch over.

To help communicate the change there will be:

- social media posts as well as adverts and articles in local media publications prior to the go live day.
- new signs and information boards going up on the changeover day

The use of the cashless parking app has grown steadily since its introduction and now between 60 and 70% of our parking revenue comes through the app. It is therefore very important to get the message out to customers ahead of it going live, but not too early as this may cause confusion.

The new contract will allow South Hams District Council make savings. There will be no changes to what we charge our customers at changeover.

Please look out for the information and share with your constituents.

Stuart Noyce / Head of Community Services

Help for existing and aspiring market traders

Please encourage entrepreneurs in your constituency to make the most of new grants.

For market traders who want to improve their market presence or for those who need help with the costs to set up a pitch, new funding is available to help.

Through the Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund, we are offering financial support to eligible businesses across the South Hams, with grants available from £150 to £1,000.

Grants can be used to buy essential trading equipment like gazebos, tables, and digital payment terminals.

The funding is designed to enhance winter trading, promote participation across all three local markets (Totnes, Kingsbridge, and Ivybridge), and reduce start-up costs for new



traders. Eligible businesses, including limited companies, sole traders, and charities, can apply by completing an [online form](#). Applications close in January 2025 or when funds are exhausted.

We want to help support the local economy, including our wonderful market traders, as much as we can.

Interested businesses can find out more and apply [online here](#).

Rebecca McKee | Food and Agricultural Officer