

Report from DCC Councillor Dan Thomas to the Ugborough Parish Community Meeting.

Highways

I have been able to introduce 2 projects to the department during 2025, with a third about to start:

1) The 'Common Sense' pothole trial

This ran across 2 electoral divisions in 2025 (1 urban, 1 rural) where the process was that for every pothole reported that met the safety criteria (300mm by 40mm vertical edge), the team would be empowered to fix other defects that did not (meet the criteria). So enthused were the gangs that they decided to use a range of 500m in either direction or to the nearest junction. In practical terms, this is too costly and too large an area. In 2026, a larger version of the trial will run across 7 divisions where the gangs will be asked to follow the 'reasonable person' test, ie would the public reasonably expect you to mend that pothole while you are there as well as this one. Locations will be picked on pothole data as well as those areas high in elderly, disabled and/or pregnant road users, who are disproportionately affected by poor road surfaces.

2) The Parish Protocol

We are in the process of employing a member of staff specifically to run the PP, which will support towns and parishes to buy bespoke schemes of work from DCC – this will include 20mph zones, parish white lining remarks, zebra crossings, extra road signage – anything in short that the county either does not feel is essential or which it has budgeted for but not within the time frame requested by the Town or Parish Council.

3) The Fast Response Squads.

These will be set up for 2026/27 as four geographically based teams with a short work programme, meaning that Councillors and their Neighbourhood Highways Officers will be able to get some quick results in areas that are causing particular issues for a community. This is precisely the sort of rapid response that will help to change the 'Computer says no' belief that many have about the Highways Department.

On top of these, and as previously reported, this year's budget includes an additional £15 million investment in Devon's roads, alongside a commitment to maintain £10 million per year in additional funding over the following five years. This is a major shift in approach. For too long, highways funding has been reactive and insufficient, leading to a cycle of patching rather than repairing.

The extra funding will allow us to move beyond emergency pothole filling and begin tackling structural deterioration in a more strategic way. That means more resurfacing, more preventative maintenance, and more drainage work to stop water destroying road foundations in the first place.

After one of the worst winters on record for storm damage, this investment is both timely and essential. While it will not fix every problem overnight, it represents a serious and sustained

commitment to improving the condition of Devon's roads. It is worth pointing out that we have had 50 gangs out all the time over the winter, fixing around 2500 potholes per week.

At the same time, an extra £4 million of revenue funding will allow us to continue to fix the potholes that we have now, as well as addressing the regular issue of blocked culverts, grips and buddle holes in quicker order.

Integrated Adult Social Care priorities

We are continuing with our existing four priorities that will shape our work over the next twelve months, building on the progress we've made. As a reminder our four priorities remain:

- We will reduce waiting times
- We will find local solutions that promote independence
- We will consistently deliver best practice
- We will work within our budget

Children's Services

In a report published in December last, the Department for Education's Commissioner Nigel Richardson CBE recognises significant progress in improving services for children and families, while acknowledging that further work is needed.

The Commissioner concludes that Devon now has the capacity and capability to improve itself, and recommends that operational control of services should remain with the council rather than be transferred to a trust.

The report praises:

- strong corporate leadership: children's services are now the council's top priority, with clear commitment from senior staff
- strong political leadership, with the Leader and Cabinet having made children's futures their top priority
- a stabilised leadership team: An experienced interim Director of Children's Services (DCS) and a strong Deputy Director have brought confidence and clarity, supported by a permanent senior leadership team for the first time in years
- workforce development: recruitment and retention are improving, supported by initiatives such as the Social Work Academy and Leadership Development Programme
- strategic investment: the council has committed £156m over 10 years through its Growing Futures programme to provide more local homes for children in care.
- improved partnership working: relationships with Ofsted and safeguarding partners have strengthened

As a footnote, we should hear imminently both from OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission regarding progress in Children's and Adults' services respectively.

Young People

Over the course of 2025/26, the Devon Youth Forum has been re-energised, with a series of events taking place at County Hall.

The priority for 2025-26 was **'Places to go, things to do'**.

This project is based on the belief that all young people in Devon should be able to access *"affordable activities and places in our local areas; somewhere to go with friends for fun, relaxation and to try new things"*.

(This was the most voted topic in our [Make Your Mark 2025](#) ballot, receiving 20% of the vote. **Mental health** and **public transport** came second and third in the ballot, receiving 16% and 13% of the votes respectively.)

Locality

I was delighted to support the Parish with £300 towards the cost of exercise classes,

For 2026/27, the allocation has returned to £10 000 per councillor (as it was until c2022) and I would be delighted to hear from any community group in 2026 in need of seed funding for projects that benefit the parish.