

County Councillor Report – November 2025

Dear Parish Councillors,

As winter approaches, I want to thank you all for your continued commitment to your communities and for keeping me updated on local matters. I'd also like to thank you for inviting me to your Parish Council meetings, so far I have been able to exceed my self-imposed expectation of attending every 3rd Parish Council meeting.

October has been another month of scrutiny, decision-making and community engagement, and I am pleased to share a few highlights from across the division and County Hall.

Locality Budget – Supporting Local Projects

It has been a pleasure to award several new grants from my County Councillor Locality Budget this month. These small amounts of funding often make a huge difference to community life, helping local people turn good ideas into action.

Kings Nympton Primary School Gardening Club has received support to create a new school garden and outdoor learning area. The project will teach children where their food comes from, the importance of looking after the environment, and how the seasons affect nature. It will also provide a calm, inclusive space where pupils can learn outside the classroom and gain practical experience of growing food sustainably.

The North Devon Ceramics Academy has also been awarded funding to strengthen its social prescription model, which is one of the most impressive community wellbeing projects I have come across. The Academy's approach uses creativity and pottery as a form of gentle, informal therapy. Participants, often referred through health and social care professionals, are able to rebuild confidence, find purpose, and reconnect with others through shared creative work.

This model demonstrates how art, wellbeing and community can be brought together with measurable outcomes. It reduces isolation, improves mental health, and gives people pride in their achievements. I would encourage other charities and community groups to look closely at what the Ceramics Academy has built. Their model could serve as a blueprint for social prescription across Devon and beyond, helping people to stay well and connected without placing additional pressure on the NHS.

Sustainable Chulmleigh has received a grant towards its community projects promoting local sustainability, energy awareness and biodiversity. The group continues to play an important role in helping residents understand the small, practical steps that together make a big difference.

I have also awarded funding to Chulmleigh Positive Project's Blue Hearts campaign, which encourages local residents to mark and protect wildlife-friendly areas across the parish. The campaign is a simple but powerful way of raising awareness about pollinators, wildflower habitats and the value of letting nature thrive in our shared spaces.

These projects show the strength of our local community sector and the creativity that flourishes when small groups are supported. If your parish or community organisation has a project that would benefit from a small grant, please do get in touch.

Community Speed Watch and Rural Road Safety

Over recent weeks I have joined the Umberleigh Community Speed Watch group for several of their roadside sessions. I have been shocked by both the speeds recorded and the attitude of some drivers on our narrow rural lanes.

Community Speed Watch volunteers play a vital role in gathering data and raising awareness. The evidence they collect is used by Devon and Cornwall Police to prioritise enforcement, and by Devon County Council when assessing requests for safety upgrades and speed limit changes.

I would encourage every parish to consider setting up a Community Speed Watch group if one does not already exist. Chittlehampton is leading by example and is looking at purchasing a set of mobile Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) that show drivers their speed and can be moved around the parish so they don't get ignored. I would also be very happy to join any local team for a session or two, so please do get in touch if you would like to discuss how to get one started.

Local Government Reorganisation – “One Devon” Proposal

The long-running debate about Local Government Reorganisation has reached a new stage. Devon County Council will be submitting its preferred One Devon proposal to government. LGR is a cabinet matter, so although we will be discussing the proposal at the extraordinary full council meeting in November, we will only make recommendations to cabinet before they submit the final proposal. Officers and Councillors have put thousands of hours of work and analysis into this proposal and I am confident that DCC's proposal is the most comprehensive of all the proposals we've seen so far.

This model retains Devon as a single county authority, with Plymouth and Torbay remaining as independent unitaries. While the earlier 1-4-5 model creating smaller unitaries had merit when it appeared we might be forced into rapid change under the

previous administration, financial assessments have since shown that larger structures are more viable and sustainable. We were threatened with delayed elections last winter, so the 1-4-5 was a coherent plan agreed to by all 8 District Councils which would help alleviate some of the risk.

The One Devon model is far from ideal, but in my opinion it is the least worst option available. It would avoid splitting the county, protect shared services, and introduce Neighbourhood Committees with devolved budgets and decision-making powers. These new committees could be a genuine opportunity to bring together county councillors, schools, parish and town councils, charities and local groups to make decisions at a more local level. This would see Liberal Democrat values put into action, by providing real devolution to local communities, rather than the mere pretence of devolution used to justify these unwelcome reorganisation orders.

Unfortunately, Plymouth, Exeter, and Torbay have all submitted proposals that disregard the rest of Devon. While Local Government Reorganisation remains an unwelcome distraction, we must make the best of a flawed process. I will continue to argue for strong local accountability and against any change that undermines rural representation.

Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee

The Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee has held several extended sessions this month. Much of our work has focused on the South West Ambulance Service's decision to stand down Fire Co-Responders.

After robust questioning from the committee, the Chief Executive has agreed to pause the stand-down indefinitely until replacement volunteers are recruited and trained. This is a welcome outcome and a good example of how scrutiny can protect essential community services.

We have also been examining the planned merger of the Devon and Cornwall Integrated Care Boards (ICBs). Devon's ICB has been told to find savings of around £200 million, approximately 8% of its total budget. Such cuts would be devastating to services already under strain. We will continue to challenge these proposals and to ensure the impact on patients and carers is fully understood.

Highways and Road Maintenance

Many residents have noticed gradual improvement on local roads as new maintenance approaches begin to take effect. The pilot pothole programme introduced in the autumn

is helping to reduce repeat visits and tackle clusters of defects in one go. That said, there is still much work to do.

The winter is the worst time for our roads. As we begin to see harder frosts, any cracks in the road surface attracts water which expands when it freezes. This constant cycling of freeze-thaw causes potholes to open up in just a few days. Legally, DCC has to repair “safety defects” under a very strict timeline. This unmovable deadline coupled with stretched services means that repairs will sometimes have to be carried out in adverse conditions. If a pothole is filled in the rain, the repair will probably fail at the next frost, however the legal deadline will be reset and our highway maintenance teams get another few weeks to get on top of the list.

This is far from ideal. We need resilient roads that are repaired properly. I will keep working with our cabinet member for highways to find innovative solutions to this perennial problem.

Please continue to report highway issues via the County Council’s online system, and if you receive an unsatisfactory response or see no progress after a reasonable time, please send the reference number to me. I will ensure it is followed up directly with officers. Consistent, evidence-based reporting remains the best way to secure repairs and investment in our rural network.

Looking Ahead

In the coming month I will be:

- Continuing scrutiny of the Health and Adult Care system, including the ICB merger proposals.
- Preparing for the next Full Council meeting on Local Government Reorganisation.
- Supporting local groups applying for locality funding.
- Meeting with parish councils and Community Speed Watch groups to discuss road safety priorities.
- Following up on drainage, flooding and surface water issues reported across the division.
- Hopefully issuing lots more Locality Budget grants to community groups!

Thank you again for your ongoing work and collaboration. Your feedback and local knowledge are invaluable in ensuring that Devon County Council remains accountable and responsive to rural communities.

With best wishes,

Cllr Ed Tyldesley

County Councillor for Chulmleigh & Landkey Division