

County & District Councillor's Monthly Report Cllr. Jacqi Hodgson - Date of Report: 10th December 2022
Devon County Councillor for Totnes & Dartington
(incl. Harberton, Harbertonford, Staverton, Landscope & part of Berry Pomeroy)

Devon County Council: key issues

COVID – all eligible persons continue to be actively encouraged to get their COVID 19 and Flu jabs

Streptococcus A infection advice is provided at this link: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/eycs/scarlet-fever-and-group-a-streptococcal-infections/>

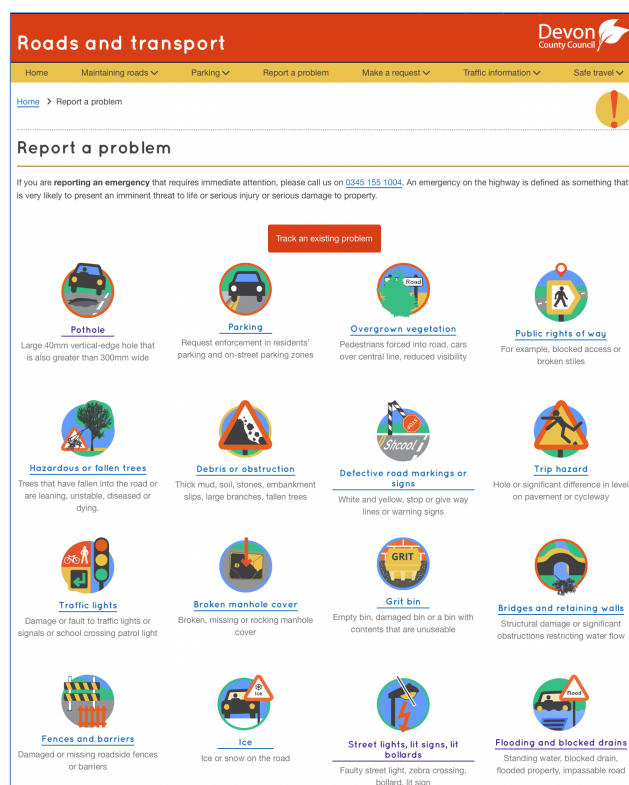
Financial situation at DCC: the Leader of our Council, Councillor John Hart, described our financial situation as "never having been so bleak". "Our growing deficit is due to surging demand for care and support, continuing costs of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the dramatic rise in costs and inflation. **We have to save about £73 million from our budget this financial year** - we've budgeted to save about half that so far and need to find the rest - and we're projecting another £75 million savings needed next financial year."

REPORT IT webpage

Highways issues, from street lights not working to drains flooding and potholes, these can be reported directly into DCC's Report it webpages. This sends a message directly to the DCC commissioned service providers use this link and follow the symbol to the maps when you can pinpoint the problem, receive a reference number which will trigger a notification to let you know when the fault is likely to be repaired and you can use this to track the repair or add your weight/ name to a problem already reported in:

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/>

INVESTMENT ZONES have been dropped by the UK Government, although the Freeports will proceed. This includes the South Devon Freeport. (I continue to be very concerned about the benefit of these to local residents)



Devon County Council Full Council meeting: 8th Dec. 2022

Re: Stagecoach Bus services in Bridgetown, Totnes.

The Gold Bus service was re-routed in August, such that residents need to walk to Bridgetown Hill (A381) to catch the Gold bus, or use the 88 bus service (which is not the same as the previous Gold Bus service or routes). Residents have been very active in trying to get this service reinstated.

On behalf of Bridgetown residents, I presented to Council Leader Cllr John Hart, a petition signed by 210 local residents regarding the disastrous changes to the Stage coach Gold Bus routes in Bridgetown, Totnes. It read as follows: " We the undersigned, demand that Stagecoach South West reconsider its decision to reroute the Gold bus avoiding Brigetown, which limits public access to buses for local workers, residents, family and friends, and to find a better solution to the traffic issues in Higher Westonfields.

The new routes provide a very restricted service to Totnes and increase the number of buses and journey time needed to go further afield onwards to Plymouth or Torquay.

Many bus users will find it very difficult if not impossible to access the new stops on Bridgetown Hill, because of the extra distance to walk, with the steepness of the hill adding difficulty , especially for those using mobility aids, with shopping or with children, lack of seats or shelter when waiting.

There is a high element of safety concerns in crossing Bridgetown Hill, more congestion on the Hill and also having to walk down unlit alleyways at night.

With the petition was a statement from the residents of the issues they now face since this key service was re-routed:

- Crossing the road at the top of Bridgetown Hill is horrendous – even hard for an active mobile person.
- No new timetables at Stafford Court bus stop – people still waiting for the Gold Bus (that is no longer serving this area!)
- Timing of 88 service – 5 minutes after Bob the Bus means not many people are using that one
- People’s journey time to Paignton is doubled, now 2 journeys, 3 on to Torquay
- No evening weekend services that are good enough
- Air Quality on Bridgetown Hill
- Lighting on cut-through to Bridgetown unsafe in the dark
- More people are just using cars instead

The residents also included letters of support from Willow Tree Housing Association, and Anthony Mangnall MP, comments regarding the campaign by Tony Cox, the father of Lorraine Cox who was murdered in Exeter in 2020, plus their correspondence with Stagecoach, their response to the residents, Stagecoach had claimed that the reason for the change was “ The company were receiving complaints from the residents in Higher Westonfields advising our double decker vehicles were causing damage to the road, with this in mind the Gold service was removed from this area and replaced with the extension to the 88 service”.

Cllr Andrea Davies, Cabinet member for Highways and Infrastructure at DCC agreed to look into these problems and see what can be done.

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON

Re: Bus Services

Now that DCC has entered into an Enhanced Partnership arrangement with the Bus Companies operating in Devon:

(a) What influence and powers will be available to DCC officers to seek improved standards to address the considerable on-going problems with bus services. These problems include frequent cancellations of bus services (particularly late services), failure to stop at poorly marked bus stops, last minute changes to routes, lack of bus shelters, lack of proper consultation and adequate notification when services are to be closed and night-time closure of Bus Stations which result in long-distance buses dropping people off and needing to await connections during the night in quiet side-streets?

(b) Will there be a detailed review of bus services and routes to check what level of overall coverage is currently available to the public.

(c) Now that we seem to be beyond the worst of COVID, will there be a promotional campaign to get more people back on buses as a sustainable form of transport that can help us address air quality issues in residential and urban areas and improve our response to the climate emergency?

(d) Are there any plans for the bus fleets to bring in smaller and electric vehicles to reduce the air pollutants from diesel buses?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS

(a) DCC officers will retain the same powers as they do now. However, the Enhanced Partnership will be able to set and control a wide range of local standards relating to bus services. The Enhanced Partnership Board will meet quarterly and includes representatives from both our majority and smaller operators.

We are also setting up a Bus Users & Stakeholder (BUS) Forum which will enable us to gather views and identify current issues from bus user groups and other key stakeholders. The Partnership will also be developing a Passenger Charter which will go towards improving the provision of information management for passengers.

As part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) capital funding from the DfT, the Enhanced Partnership will be making improvements to bus stop infrastructure throughout the county. This includes improving facilities at bus stops and bus stations, as well as real time and printed information.

The market town bus stations are controlled by the district/town councils. Exeter Bus Station is controlled by Stagecoach. Again, as part of the BSIP capital funding for the Enhanced Partnership, the Highways Team are piloting a project to enhance the streetlighting around bus stops in Exeter which is aimed at improving passenger safety and confidence.

When the BSIP was developed in 2021 there was an extensive review of the level of bus service for communities throughout the county. The BSIP document aspired to have set levels of bus service dependent on the size of the community. Unfortunately, the BSIP financial allocation for enhancing services was very limited and we will have only a few bus enhancement projects in the county.

(b) Within the DCC revenue budget, the allocated spend on a supported bus service is based on current patronage levels and not the size of the community the bus serves. This approach focusses spend on supported services where it is needed. We regularly monitor patronage levels on bus services. The level of coverage and frequency of our bus services is displayed most clearly on our interactive bus map: [Devon Public Transport Map \(cartoqgold.co.uk\)](http://cartoqgold.co.uk)

(c) Yes – absolutely. We have only just received our allocation of funding from the DfT (within the last few weeks). Our BSIP clearly outlines our plans for the promotion of bus services across the county. We fully intend to continue with an extension to the marketing campaign we ran previously in 2021 [Back on the Bus Campaign 2021 - Travel Devon](#). We hope, now that the situation with Stagecoach's driver recruitment/retention and lost mileage is improving, we will be best placed to proceed with this campaign, and really highlight to people how they can make a step change in their travel planning, and all work together towards tackling the climate emergency in Devon.

In 2023 we will also be launching several fares initiatives which will hopefully be attractive to future prospective bus passengers. These include the government backed £2 fare scheme which will run from January to March, as well as subsidised town fares, and a subsidised Devon Day Ticket. Further details on these will be published in due course.

(d) Several of our larger operators have plans to replace their fleet with more environmentally vehicles over the next decade. However, this does require significant investment. DCC have submitted two ZEBRA (Zero Emissions Bus Regional Area) Fund applications, and also applied for funding for electric buses in our initial BSIP bid, however unfortunately these applications were unsuccessful. We remain committed to improving vehicle standards and reducing air pollution and will work with our operators to identify future investment opportunities.

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON

Re: Energy Crisis

In the wake of the wider recognition of the climate crisis at COP 27 and the recent publication of the Devon Carbon Plan, and the current energy crisis that is causing huge financial stress, adding to the cost of living crisis and likely to get worse, will DCC support the opportunity to increase the renewable energy capture in Devon by active lobbying for the necessary National Grid link, (which we are told is currently awaiting Hinkley C power station to come of stream), to be installed as soon as possible, i.e. much earlier as a matter of urgency?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS

Investment in the region's electricity network is essential to enable us to connect new sources of low-carbon energy, including renewables, and to deliver electricity safely, efficiently and reliably, thereby supporting net-zero carbon targets. The Hinkley Point Connection Project is of particular significance, providing a 57km long new high-voltage electricity connection between Bridgwater and Seabank near Avonmouth, with this linked to the development of the Hinkley Point C by EDF. However, there are many other grid constraints in the South West and regulatory issues that result in high connection costs for new projects that often make the investment unviable. The significance of this issue is fully recognised by the County Council, which is already engaging with others – particularly the Heart of the South West LEP, the South West Net-Zero Hub, organisations such as Regen and through direct liaison with National Grid – to highlight the need for urgent action. Ofgem has listened to the lobbying for regulatory reform – from April 2023 more of the costs of new connections will be shared in a fair and proportionate way amongst all network users, making the costs of connecting new generation and consumption projects (like heat pumps and electric vehicle chargers) more affordable. At the same time, the County Council is working with community energy companies and others to explore locally based solutions which might facilitate renewable energy deployment whilst minimising reliance on enhanced grid capacity. These remain key areas for further attention in taking forward the aspirations of the Devon Carbon Plan.

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON

Re: Waste Management

In moving forward with the Devon Carbon Plan and recognising that waste management has a high carbon footprint, can support be reinstated for Devon Community Composting Network to enable them to provide direct support with, promotion, information and advice for new locally based community composting initiatives coming forward?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

'Recycling Credits' are either statutory payments made to district councils by the County Council or can be made as discretionary payments to registered groups or individuals recycling or composting household waste. The County Council currently pays discretionary credits to approximately 10 community composting groups. The groups register with their district council, who administer their claims. All groups must operate in accordance with the scheme guidance see [The Recycling Credit Scheme - guidance for third party groups in Devon - Waste and Recycling](#) to ensure that claims meet data quality requirements. Payments are made for the "green waste equivalent" which is either the weight of the garden waste entering the site or a calculation based on the compost resulting. On receipt, all claims are checked and approved by the Waste Collection Authorities for payment with an annual audit carried out by DCC to ensure that payments are valid.

The Devon Community Composting Network Co-ordinator was funded by the Devon Authorities Strategic Waste Committee who decided to withdraw support a number of years ago due to financial constraints as well as a desire to focus their budget on more strategic priorities. Given the severe financial pressure that all Local Authorities are currently facing, it is extremely unlikely that the Committee would be able to consider funding a new Co-ordinator. However, community composting groups continue to be supported by their Local Authorities as well as networking with each other.

Motions at Full Council:

Hierarchy of Road users and safety: Cllr Wrigley (Lib Dem) proposed a motion regarding the recent changes to the Highway Code; Further to which it was agreed that "Council recognises that the safety of pedestrians and vulnerable road users is paramount in the planning, delivery, operation and maintenance of highway infrastructure and the planned review of the Local Transport Plan should be used to reinforce the hierarchy of users."

Environmental Protections: Cllr Bailey (Ind) proposed 'This Council is strongly opposed to the reckless ripping up of environmental protections by the Conservative Government including the creation of 38 new investment zones which have been described by the RSPB as "an attack on nature'. This Council urges the government to uphold the legal protections which are vital for wildlife, particularly as the UK is one of the most depleted countries in the world (it is in the bottom 10% of the world's countries, well below China and the last among the G7 group of nations Further to which it was agreed that the Cabinet's advice be accepted and that the County Council writes to the Secretary of State for the Environment to highlight:

- (a) the concerns about the currently perceived policy threats to nature;
- (b) the importance of strong environmental protection alongside other statutory considerations to achieve our strategic aim of supporting sustainable and inclusive economic prosperity that improves the health and wellbeing of our residents; and
- (c) that careful streamlining of the delivery of regulatory requirements, rather than their weakening or removal, is the most effective way of ensuring that environmental interests do not cause inappropriate delay or constraint to future growth.

(I proposed an amendment to remove the last paragraph but that vote was lost)

Ban Glyphosate: I proposed the following motion: 'This Council will ban the use of the pesticide Glyphosate on all Council land from January 1st 2023

Further to which the following was agreed "that the Cabinet's advice be accepted and that in line with its adopted Environmental Policy, County Council services should only use glyphosate if absolutely necessary, where practical alternatives are not available."

(In my supporting statement I pointed out to the Chamber that: 162 other countries including China, Canada Peru and Spain - where a lot of our food comes from - have all banned Glyphosate and that had we remained in the European Union, the UK would have banned Glyphosate on Thursday 15th December 2022 along with the rest of Europe. I did attempt to amend the Cabinet's recommended – albeit very watered down - policy applied to DCC owned farms, but this was outvoted too). Very disappointing!

20 mph Zones for 2023 listings

More 20 mph zones are expected to be introduced in Devon next year after the county council secured a further £150,000 for them. Lower speed limits were approved for the four 'most in need' Devon communities this year, part of a new way of considering 20 mph requests.

The new 'prioritisation system' was introduced because of the high number of such requests to the council. It involved 'expressions of interest' from local communities for new areas, of which 105 were received. Each scheme was assessed, taking into account average speeds at key locations and the number of vulnerable road users in the area. Other factors include the speed related collision history, the level of community support, the presence of an active 'community speed watch' group and the community's deprivation index ranking. The four highest-ranked applications were selected areas of Tiverton and Winkleigh, and all the roads in Atherington (North Devon) and Ashburton.

Cabinet Member for Transport Cllr Stuart Hughes, announced that there will be another chance for areas to secure cash for new 20 mph zones in the next financial year. A written report outlined how a further £150,000 has been secured in the council's road safety capital allocation for 2023/24, adding: "Six further communities could benefit from new 20 mph limits with this additional funding." The council plans to use the same system for rating applications again. Communities do not need to resubmit expressions of interest, as they will be reviewed again and against any new bids, but existing proposals can be modified. Cllr Hughes said the council was open to funding more schemes should extra money be found, while he also invited parish councils to get involved "if they would like to pay for some of the schemes." **All new or modified submissions must be completed by 31 January.**

Families to receive help to buy food during school holidays

Families in Devon on low incomes, whose children receive free school meals, will get support this winter to help them buy food during the school holidays. Once again, DCC are providing holiday food vouchers for children and young people who are eligible for benefit-related free school meals. For families with children at school and whose financial circumstances have changed, their children may be eligible for free school meals. You can find out by applying online through our [Devon Citizen's Portal](#).

The deadline for applications, in order to receive free school meal holiday vouchers for the Christmas school holiday, is Friday 16 December, so please apply as soon as possible.

Before the end of this term, DCC will be sending eligible families free school meal holiday vouchers to cover both the Christmas and February 2023 half-term holidays at the same time. That's to give families more flexibility to prioritise and budget their winter food expenditure themselves. Vouchers can be used at the following supermarkets: Aldi, Iceland, Tesco, Morrisons, Sainsburys, Asda, Waitrose and M&S Food.

Support for households using prepayment meters

More households using prepayment meters are struggling to pay their energy bills, according to [Citizens Advice Devon](#). The charity has confirmed an increase in the number of calls they're receiving from prepayment meter households, regarding rising costs of energy.

While prepayment meters are said to be good at helping people budget their finances, users of them often end up paying more for their gas or electricity.

Citizen's Advice Devon say that the increasing number of calls they're receiving is a reflection of the increase in households using prepayment meters. And because energy providers often move households on to prepayment meters when they are struggling to pay their energy bills, it's a reflection that more households are struggling financially.

We're concerned. [We're continuing to provide Citizens Advice Devon with money from the Government's Household Support Fund](#) which enables the charity to provide financial support to households that are using prepayment meters.

SOUTH HAMS DISTRICT COUNCIL

SHDC administer the Household Support Fund, which is there to assist those struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, which includes the cost of energy. The form is now available on the South Hams website, here is the link:

<https://www.southhams.gov.uk/household-support-fund>

Community Wellbeing Fund & Cost of Living Community Action Fund – details at this link:

<https://www.southhams.gov.uk/article/9362>

Sustainable South Hams has circulated the following useful information:

*“Below is a link to a **“Reducing your Heating Bills”** handout. At a guess I think this could allow people to cut 5 - 20 % from their heating bill. It is intended to be simple, readable, and editable. It's A4 so anyone with a printer can print it themselves. If you select File > Make a Copy you then get your own, editable copy which you can adapt and use locally. I've put them on some noticeboards, left them in the village hall and in the community shop in another village. We've also adapted the content for use on the Parish Council website and I do some social media posts about it. Share it around, adapt it, change it, **use it.***

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FHNN03RInMQ3HeJh0RSH_Ojhw0DIpJce_IG0wS9kqOw/edit?usp=sharing

AgeUK also make a little booklet focused on action that older residents can take. It's not so big as to be bulky, and not so small as to not be valued. I rang AgeUK Exeter who were very friendly and efficient - they had plenty to send out - so they sent me a few to put out alongside these A4 handouts as a trial.

https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/information-guides/ageukiq27_winter_wrapped_up_inf.pdf”

Community Wellbeing Grants are available from SHDC – at this link (nb some close for applications this Friday 16th Dec)

<https://www.southhams.gov.uk/article/9362>

OPEN A COMMUNAL ‘WARM SPACE’. If you have a free event or a place where local people can gather together this winter, let SHDC know at this email: communications@swdevon.gov.uk

Warm Space offered at Totnes United Free Church’s Living Room Café 56, Fore St., Totnes). This provides a warm space to enjoy refreshments and converse with friends and other community members. Café runs from 10.30am every Tuesday and 11am every Thursday. Everyone is welcome.

SHDC New Climate Emergency Planning Statement came into effect on December 1st22, and now applies to all new planning applications from that date. <https://www.southhams.gov.uk/article/9376/Climate-Emergency-Planning-Statement>

REMINDER – THESE ARE STILL AVAILABLE - Some Bicycle Racks have become available from Devon County Council:

They have the following cycle racks available to support the community of Totnes.

- 10 space (5 hoops) - Toast Rack - bolt down
- Single - stainless steel bolt down cycle racks
- Single - stainless steel root fixed cycle racks

“They are stored at the Lemonford depot and the way the programme works is that the installation locations and layouts are agreed with DCC, the stand stock is gifted to the community and then the community (landowner) arranges for the installation to take place. So, the next step would be for some photos or simple drawings to be produced in line with the DCC cycle parking guidance (attached), sent through to @Matthew.Mcdonald and then we can take forward the delivery/collection arrangements.”

I’m not sure how many DCC have in total, but please let me know ASAP if you are interested in this offer.

LOCAL ISSUES:

REMINDER - ROAD CLOSURES Totnes Fore Street (from the King Bill to East Gate Arch) and South Street. January 2023 to Easter due to Gas maintenance works and installation of fibre.

LED Lighting Roll Out – in Totnes

DCC is carrying out an upgrade to its current street lighting asset, replacing existing lanterns with new low energy LED lanterns. DCC’s Contractor “Energieo” is due to commence the upgrade in Totnes in the coming weeks. The work will have minimum disruption to the public and should be completed by the end of February if not sooner. Anyone experiencing any problems or issues should report them directly

to <https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/>

to enable DCC to log contact details and deal with issues in the most efficient way.

Totnes Climate & Ecological emergency working group: the next meeting will be **virtual only on January 17th 2023** (in case the weather is poor etc) on Zoom at this link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81347699786> Meeting ID: 813 4769 9786. Future monthly meetings will be hybrid, i.e. in person in the Guildhall and also accessible interactively via a Zoom link. At the last meeting (Nov), it was agreed to recommend funding support to some local project addressing climate change and to fund copies of the Sustainable South Hams Gardening for Nature booklet to be delivered to all households in Totnes in the new year. Congratulations to Sustainable Dittisham and their Parish Council for producing this excellent guide to supporting nature and making it available to other parishes to reproduce for their residents.

Message from Trees4Totnes: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/dec/02/a-uk-tree-provides-hundreds-of-pounds-of-benefits-a-year-report-finds>

Totnes Rural Area Youth Engagement (TRAYE) Project – Steering Group meeting 26.11.22

A very pleasant and well attended meeting was hosted by TRAYE project in Staverton Court Rooms. Parish Councillors from Yealmpton and Holberton also attended further to their expression of interest in having TRAYE project provide some youth services and events in their parishes too. It was also noted that interest has been expressed by residents of Bridgetown in Totnes and their local resident's group Bridgetown Alive! to have TRAYE project services in The recently refurbished Community Hall in Bridgetown (Berry Pomeroy PC). The relevant parish councils will now be contacted by their parish councillors to establish if the annual contribution to support TRAYE's costs in providing these services can be agreed and if so, dates when the TRAYE services can start in these additional areas.

Staverton Moor Road.

The much needed and long awaited improvements to the surface of Moor Road have finally been agreed and works will commence on January 12th, lasting approximately 3 days. This road is unusual as it belongs to SHDC, not DCC, i.e. it has not been adopted since the SHDC housing stock was sold off, even SHDC did not realise that it was theirs until the complaints about the road surface were investigated. Once these works have been completed, I will be seeking adoption by DCC to ensure this road is properly maintained.

Old oak tree at Dart View

The problems of this tree being constantly hit by large agricultural vehicles passing by on a regular basis, is having a severe adverse impact on the tree. The tree officers at both SHDC and DCC are looking into what can be done to protect the tree, but with signage difficult at this site to offer any warning to protect, the best protection would be for those drivers involved to be asked to be more careful and avoid hitting this important piece of local natural heritage.

Dartington issues:

Planning application 0612/16/OPA. Brimhay Bungalows TQ9 6HQ. This outline planning application was approved with all matters reserved in 2017. The applicant was Dartington Parish Council. This application was unable to be progressed to a decision notice being issued as the landowner at the time refused to agree the 106 agreement. Since then the landowner has built out a different permission for redevelopment of the site and the homes are occupied. The LPA has therefore suggested that the application withdraws their application as this application is no longer likely to be viable to go further.

New Tree Preservation Order Ref: TPO1074. Date: 15/11/2022; Site: 33 Hunters Moon, Dartington, TQ9 6JT
Any objections or comments, must be received in writing within 28 days of 15th November 2022. The Council will carefully consider all objections and comments before deciding whether to make the Order permanent. There is information on Tree Preservation Orders and the other types of tree protection at: <https://www.southhams.gov.uk/article/3490/Protected-Trees>

Ukraine School Travel support for Dartington based families

Further to request by two host families (that live close together), whose related Ukrainian family have 3 cousins between them, I supported their appeal to DCC Appeals Panel to fund school transport to enable all 3 children to attend the same school together. DCC provided an interpreter. This appeal was successful. FYI there is now a Ukrainian refugee support officer at SHDC. Her name is Elizabeth Coates – Elizabeth.coates@swdevon.gov.uk