

The Council Plan 2024-2028



West Devon
Borough Council



Introduction from the Leader

West Devon is an incredibly special and important place, home to a World Heritage Site, bustling market towns and stunning moorland.

However, there are challenges which many residents face. The ongoing cost of living is putting a squeeze on household incomes and the affordability of housing means that many of our younger residents may struggle to access good quality housing in the future, in the area they have grown up in. There is also the real and current threat of climate change and biodiversity loss. We cannot wait to act; we must continue to deliver on our plans and make sure that we encourage others to do the same.



Cllr Mandy Ewings

Leader
West Devon Borough Council

Our agricultural community is making great strides in exploring innovative ways to diversify, and we will continue to support them to do so by delivering our UK Shared and Rural Prosperity Funding programmes.

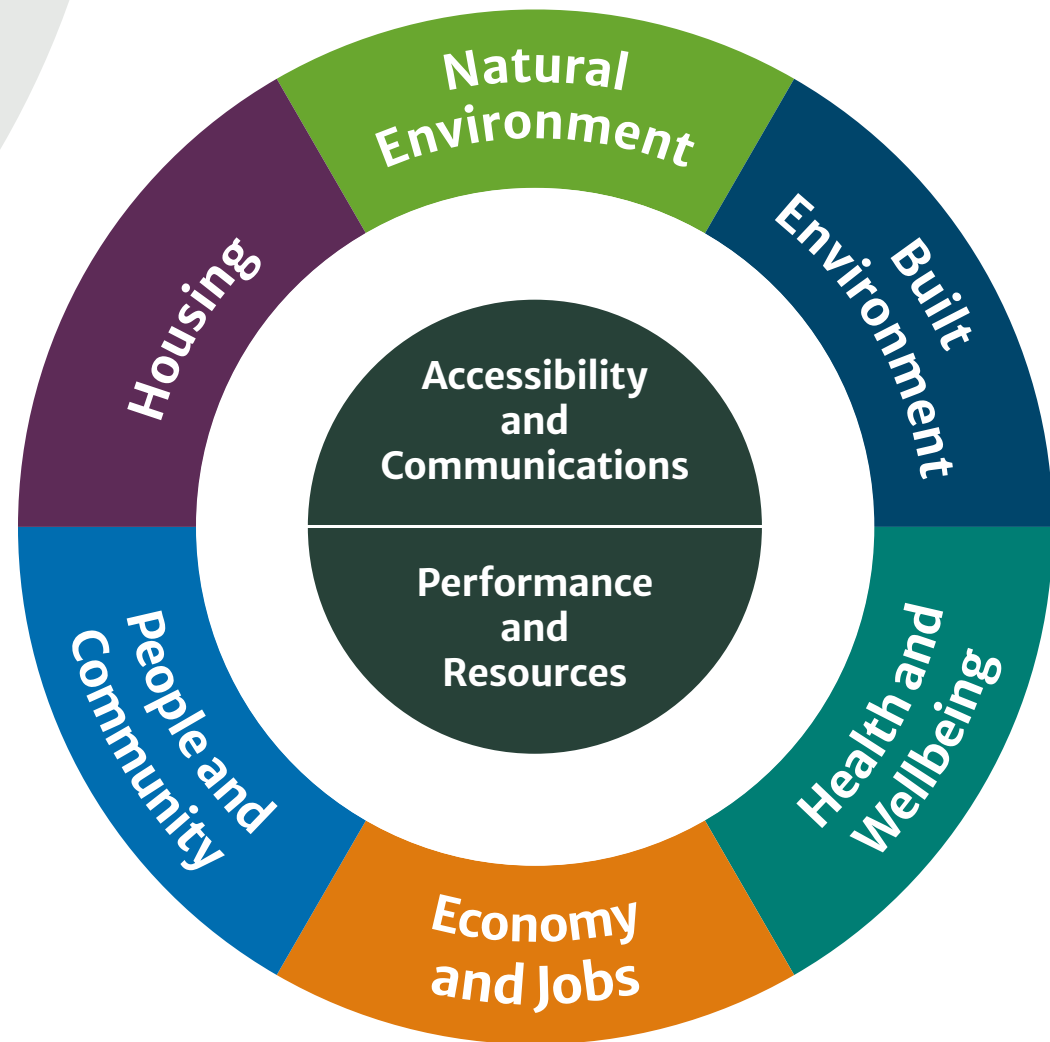
We will also make sure that we provide focused support for our less advantaged groups. We have already taken steps on this by buying our own temporary accommodation properties, developing a package of support for care leavers and guaranteeing interviews for ex-forces personnel.

To do all of this, we must make sure the Council is modern, efficient and innovative – delivering value for money and responsive services that meet the needs of our communities.

We must do all we can to support our residents and to protect West Devon for our future generations. The actions set out in this plan aim to deliver on our commitment.



Our priorities



We have eight key priorities to focus on for the next four years.

None of them can be delivered in isolation and all will contribute to the overall wellbeing of West Devon residents.

We know that we cannot achieve our ambitions for West Devon alone and so we will work with our communities and key partners in delivering this strategy.



Working together for West Devon.

Our priorities

Progressing our plans

We are not
starting with
a blank sheet
of paper ...

Since May 2023, we have taken steps to deliver a number of schemes alongside the development of The Council Plan, which include:-

- Launching a Young Persons' Climate Award;
- Buying 5 properties for temporary accommodation for those displaced by conflict;
- Leading the Devon Housing Taskforce and been a founder member of a new Devon Housing Commission, a partnership of Devon Councils that will develop recommendations to start to address the broken housing market;
- Launching a £136k Household Support Fund for residents struggling with the cost of living;
- Attending community events such as Tavistock and Okehampton Community Health and Wellbeing Fairs, Chagford Show and Tavistock Pride to directly talk to our residents;
- Launching a new website to make it even easier for online residents to interact with us;
- Progressing delivery of a number of projects funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

While we are making positive progress on delivering our wider ambitions, The Council Plan builds on the above and sets out where we are going next.



Our plan will be underpinned by

Financial Sustainability

Our financial sustainability is important in ensuring that we can deliver our priorities and good quality services to our residents. For many years local councils have received single year finance settlements. We will continue to lobby government for longer term certainty of our budgets, allowing us to make longer term plans.

Good Governance

We will make sure that we have a robust governance framework, effective decision making, and that we shape our policies and strategies in consultation with our communities and key stakeholders.

Community Development

We know that we cannot deliver a better future for West Devon alone. Our communities and the voluntary sector play a critical part in this. We will work with them and where we can, support them to deliver projects and schemes that will enhance the area for us all. We will also ensure that we invest in our own staff, making sure that they are equipped with the right skills and tools to provide responsive services.



Natural Environment

Our Ambition

The natural environment of West Devon is one of the things that makes it such a special place, one that we must protect for the future. Climate change and biodiversity loss continue to be a significant threat to our area and while any action we take will be small in terms of the required global change, we can and must do all we can. We will lead by example, encouraging our communities to also play their part.

The latest science from The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the UK Government's Climate Change Committee, as well as real world extreme weather events, have demonstrated how critical joined up action is at reducing the very worst of future climate change scenarios.

Having declared a Climate Change and Biodiversity crisis in 2020, we will now take steps to revise our action plan. This is aligned to the Devon Carbon Plan

which sets out a roadmap for how Devon can achieve net-zero carbon by 2050 at the latest. In the meantime, there is a target of 50% reduction (below 2010 levels) by 2030.

We have secured funding to deliver a number of projects to support the Borough on the journey to net zero. This includes developing plans for active travel schemes (walking and cycling) and importantly supporting our agricultural sector to consider opportunities to future proof their businesses in regenerative sustainable ways. We will also develop plans to support and incentivise renewable energy projects such as solar panels and wind turbines to reduce carbon emissions.

We will make sure that the climate and biodiversity impact of all decisions and service changes made is fully considered from the outset, doing all we possibly can to make climate-positive decisions.



Cllr Lynn Daniel
Lead Member for
Natural Environment

Our Primary Aims

1. An increase in biodiversity across the Borough over the next 4 years.

2. Continue to make reductions in eCO2 emissions across the Borough to stay on track for net zero by 2050.

3. To encourage others to take action to lessen their own climate impact.

Our Initial Actions

- Develop and begin to implement our Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plan.
- Increase Electric Charging Points including exploring in-house delivery opportunities for EV charging point on council property.
- Implement a revised grounds maintenance programme for Council land to increase biodiversity.
- Update our 2020 Climate and Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Take a vigorous stance on the climate and biodiversity crisis leading by example and communicating what we are doing to encourage others to take similar steps, including a Use Less / Reuse / Recycle campaign.
- Promote the use of renewable energy sources within the West Devon Community.
- Launch a Thermal Imaging Camera lending scheme to enable residents and community facilities to identify areas for improving insulation in properties.
- Create allotments at South Tawton on West Devon Borough Council land – allowing residents to grow their own produce and reduce food miles.
- Organise visits to Energy from Waste plants and biodigesters to inspire improved levels of recycling and reduction in residual waste:-
 - Learn from successful regenerative farming and natural regeneration sites to inspire our future plans.
- Lobby and encourage partners to address issues not directly in the Council's control:-
 - Work with South West Water (SWW) and the Environment Agency (EA) with a 'Call for Evidence' on discharge of raw sewage into rivers;
 - Collaborate with relevant authorities and stakeholders to improve sewage treatment infrastructure;
 - Develop a plan for Wildlife Wardens.



Built Environment

Our Ambition

From the western edge of Dartmoor through to the east of Cornwall, West Devon has a built environment of global importance through the World Heritage Site. We will conserve and maintain existing historic fabric and retain and reflect locally distinctive features in the design of buildings, layouts and landscapes to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the World Heritage Site.

West Devon, together with South Hams and Plymouth, have a strategic plan for the area (Joint Local Plan) which sets out the future vision, policies and plans for our built environment up to 2034.

We will work with our communities to produce new visions for all our towns; setting out the opportunities and actions needed to make sure they remain thriving, active and accessible places. We will look to reflect these ambitions in the future Joint Local Plan.

In our urban centres, we will develop and review Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans to preserve and enhance important historic buildings and places across West Devon. We will also work with our communities to support the development of Neighbourhood Plans. These plans will reflect their hopes and aims and create local policies which will be considered in the determination of planning application to help them shape and manage their communities.



Cllr Caroline Mott

Lead Member for
Built Environment

Our Primary Aims

1. Conserve and enhance existing historic fabric and retain locally distinctive features in the design of building, layouts, street scene and landscapes to guarantee the authenticity and integrity of the World Heritage Site to maintain it for future generations.
2. Ensure that we have the infrastructure in place to meet the future needs of our communities and that these are secured and delivered by new development.

Our Initial Actions

- Support town and parish councils / neighbourhood forums in the making of at least two neighbourhood plans a year (including modifications required to existing plans) in West Devon.
- Support the refresh and expansion of Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans throughout the Conservation areas.
- Deliver Planning training sessions to Town and Parish Councils – upskilling them to understand what is important when considering applications.
- Update our enforcement procedures and strategy to ensure alignment with local priorities.
- Develop a plan for preserving the Duke of Bedford Cottages.
- Contribute to the World Heritage Site partnership and promote its importance to West Devon.
- Support the delivery of more affordable housing through the planning process.
- Deliver on our Planning Improvement Plan to make sure applicants continue to receive a better service.
- Progress with the Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plan.
- Delivery of Okehampton Transport Hub.
- Support community infrastructure and facilities through timely allocation of developer contributions to community schemes.
- Support Network Rail and Devon County Council with the development of the business case to reinstate five miles of track and deliver a new single platform station at Tavistock, which would serve communities in Tavistock, Horrabridge, Lamerton, and Mary Tavy.



Housing

Our Ambition

West Devon Borough Council has been striving to tackle the 'housing crisis'; the real term cost of housing compared to earnings and the critically low availability of rented accommodation. Strong headwinds in the private rented sector as government legislation bites, are forcing landlords to sell or increase their rents, making it difficult to find houses which are available and affordable.

The cost of energy is placing an ever greater strain on essential income, leaving many in fuel poverty. The quality of our existing housing stock is some of the worst performing, in terms of energy efficiency, in northern Europe. This mirrors the rest of the UK, which, as a whole, is responsible for around 40% of all of the country's carbon emissions.

Tens of thousands of homes already exist in West Devon, whereas only a few thousand new ones have been built in the last 5 years, and even fewer of those are affordable. To improve housing outcomes, we must therefore apply our efforts proportionally to where the biggest challenges lie.

We are, and will continue to be, a force for good, looking for opportunities to improve housing outcomes that make the greatest difference to our residents.



Cllr Mark Renders

Deputy Leader and
Lead Member for Housing

Our Primary Aims

1. Help our communities to bring affordable housing in their areas.
2. Support the needs of Homeless households and provide good quality temporary accommodation and value for money.
3. Improve outcomes for care-experienced young people by supporting them to access the housing they need.
4. Tackle damp and disrepair in rented homes.
5. Decarbonise the existing social and affordable housing stock to improve living standards, lift people out of fuel poverty and reduce energy costs for residents.

Our Initial Actions

- Progress plans with redevelopment of Council owned office space (Plymouth Road, Tavistock) for temporary accommodation.
- Work with housing associations and community land trusts to improve the number of affordable, safe and good quality homes delivered for our residents.
- Lobby government for:-
 - Changes to Right to Buy legislation to reduce the loss of existing rented housing stock particularly in rural areas;
 - An increase in the local area housing allowance, which does not reflect the true cost of rented accommodation.
- Work with residents, social and private landlords to promote better standards of housing in West Devon.
- Update our Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy Delivery plans.
- Develop new policies that influence the proportion of new development that is affordable and social rented accommodation particularly in rural areas.
- Implement 200% Council Tax charging on second homes as soon as Government allows in 2025.
- Help where possible in the delivery of affordable homes where conditions for housing need, finance, partner involvement, deliverability and social outcomes align:-
 - Support communities to bring forward housing within their locality which may include Council land;
 - Support Registered Providers (RPs) with grant applications, planning applications and communities, Towns & Parishes (Enabling Housing Team).



Health and Wellbeing

Our Ambition

The health, wellbeing and safety of residents is vitally important to achieving a better quality of life and promoting independence across the Borough.

We will support healthier, safer and fairer communities through a range of measures and by working in partnership with other agencies. We will also play a direct role in this through delivery of a range of Council services such as inspecting food premises, carrying our environmental protection schemes and responding to concerns about private sector housing standards.

Enabling residents to remain as independent as possible in their own community will continue to be a focus for us. We will achieve this through delivering of grant schemes such as disabled facility grants and supporting residents who may be struggling financially by making sure that they access benefits and grants that they are entitled to.

We will deliver this by working, and actively participating, with partner agencies like Citizens Advice and the Community Safety Partnership to support the health and wellbeing of our residents. This will mean West Devon is a place where all residents and visitors feel safe, happy and healthy.

Cllr Tony Leech

Lead Member for
Health and Wellbeing

Our Primary Aims

1. To protect and improve the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors.
2. Provide direct support to residents through the provision of schemes such as Homes Upgrade Grant, Disabled Facilities Grants and energy grants.

Our Initial Actions

- Efficiently deliver schemes that will directly contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents – Disabled Facilities Grants, Energy Efficiency Grants and Household Support Funding.
- Support young people with their Mental Health by commissioning a programme of support in schools.
- Delivery of Junior Life Skills Programme.
- Work with the Community Safety Partnership to maximise impact in the Borough to deal with anti-social behaviour and safeguarding, violence prevention, domestic abuse, drugs, changing youth culture, exploitation and hate crime.
- Implement a Council Tax Discount Scheme and Leisure Centre Access Schemes for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- Lobby the NHS to financially support exercise referral for those unable to pay and work with Fusion Leisure to promote activities already available.



People and Community

Our Ambition

Our communities are the beating heart of West Devon, they work together to overcome local challenges and deliver action to improve the Borough for our future generations.

As a Council, our role is to enhance community action and to support local groups to deliver their own ambitions. We will increase our capacity and ability to support our communities to bring forward projects that are important to them including a focus on delivering projects promoting arts and culture within the Borough.

Looking to our own services, we will ensure that our frontline services (such as Grounds Maintenance and Localities) are responsive, keeping West Devon's open spaces tidy and enabling them to be enjoyed by residents.

We know that our communities are at the forefront of making West Devon the best place to live, and we will make sure we celebrate the work of individuals and organisations.

Finally, many causes of frustration for our residents, such as poor condition of roads and provision of youth services, are outside of our direct control, but we can, and will, lobby those responsible organisations for action.



Cllr Adam Bridgewater

Lead Member for
People and Community

Our Primary Aims

1. To ensure that we provide responsive support and good quality frontline services.

2. Build effective relationships with key partners, working together to address local challenges.

3. Be a voice for our communities, calling partners to action.

Our Initial Actions

- Progress with the Okehampton and Sydenham Damerell Community Governance Reviews.
- Implement enhanced council community services.
- Support our communities to deliver projects to enhance open spaces, parks, play pitches and other community assets by awarding funding from developer contributions (Section 106) and capital projects funds.
- Carry out a review of funding for key partners to ensure alignment to our aims and ambitions.
- Work with the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) to co-produce a Community Development Action Plan.
- Raise the profile of the Council within the community by attending a range of events to promote Council services.
- Introduce a Young Persons' Climate and Biodiversity Award (Mayor).
- Lobby partners for better service provision in West Devon – for example Devon County Council (DCC) for Potholes and youth provision.
- Develop an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Commitment for the Council, so that we can be sure we're able to meet the needs of all residents in the future.
- Support communities to develop community resilience plans.
- Develop an Arts and Culture Plan for the Borough.
- Re-establish Town and Parish Council Link meetings to facilitate sharing of best practices and collaboration to address local issues.



Economy and Jobs

Our Ambition

We will create the environment for all sizes of business to flourish, through direct and indirect support and policy. This will include infrastructure and development aligned to our priorities.

We will strengthen our visitor economy, maximising the promotion of our unique cultural and heritage offer. We will identify opportunities to lobby for the best outcomes for our agricultural sector and make sure that we seize on future opportunities to attract additional funding through the Government's UK Shared Prosperity, Community Renewal Funds and other sources.

As a Council, we have a good track record of securing government funding for schemes and we will continue to leverage and improve strategic infrastructure as a means of attracting business and higher earning jobs for our residents. For example, by championing for improvements to broadband and mobile connectivity across the area.

We will also support the delivery of town plans to shape the economy of West Devon and take steps to enrich the Borough through promotion of cultural, heritage and sport activities to draw people into the area.

Cllr Neil Jory

Lead Member for
Economy and Jobs

Our Primary Aims

1. Deliver on the UK Shared Prosperity and Rural Prosperity Funding programmes.
2. Ensure improvements to strategic infrastructure (including digital connectivity) and influencing partners to act.
3. Create an environment in which business in all sectors can innovate.

Our Initial Actions

- Deliver our UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) programmes across West Devon.
- Support the progress of the Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan and work towards its implementation.
- Focus on boosting digital connectivity across the Borough – including broadband and 4G services.
- Delivery of Okehampton Transport Hub by March 2025.
- Support key business sectors in West Devon:-
 - Work with partners such as Devon Agri-tech alliance to facilitate networking between and with farms to support the implementation of regenerative farming methods;
 - Explore ways to support local farms through grants and funding opportunities to support agricultural diversification;
 - Develop a culture and arts support plan for the borough.
- Work with Town Councils and partners to develop town plans to help shape the economy of our places.
- Consult on the formation of a Okehampton Business Improvement District or Chamber of Commerce.



Cllr Chris Edmonds

Lead Member for
Performance and
Resources

Performance and Resources

Our Ambition

At the core of delivering on our ambitions for West Devon, is the need for us to deliver good quality services that respond to the needs of our residents and that we demonstrate value for money through everything we do.

Delivering rural services is expensive and we will continue to lobby Government for fairer funding for rural authorities.

Recruiting and retaining skilled employees is difficult, more so since the changing working practices coming from the pandemic – you can now live in the Southwest but work for an organisation anywhere in the country. We will focus on ensuring we invest in training and support for our employees, with the aim of being an employer of choice, where each and every employee has the right skills and tools to deliver the best service for our residents.

We will also ensure we make the best use of Council assets including our buildings, taking steps to ensure we maximise occupancy at our Kilworthy Park offices.

Only by delivering good quality, value for money services can we achieve our wider ambitions for the Borough.

Our Primary Aims

1. Support the wellbeing of our staff with training and development, the right tools to do the job and recognition of successes.

2. Make sure that we manage Council finances and assets well.

3. Guarantee efficiency in service delivery by managing performance.

4. Lead by example, ensuring that Council assets respond to our climate ambitions.

Our Initial Actions

- Deliver targeted and refreshed recruitment approaches to overcome local government job challenges.
- Identify further areas for service reviews to make sure our teams provide a good quality service.
- Carry out an annual staff survey to get feedback from staff on how we are doing.
- Apply an IT Strategy which includes a clear roadmap to adopting developing technology such as artificial intelligence (AI).
- Work with the Rural Services Network to lobby Government for fairer funding for rural services.
- Respond to the Government consultation on the Finance Settlement.
- Set a balanced budget for 2024/2025 and 2025/2026.
- Update our procurement strategy to guarantee greater emphasis on reducing climate impact of the Council supply chain and increased social value.
- Hold a 'Meet the Buyer' event to support local businesses bid for future Council contracts.
- Prepare an asset management strategy to set out how we will maximise use of our assets.

Accessibility and Communications

Our Ambition

As a Council, it is important that we constantly consider how best to deliver our services, making sure that all residents can access the services they need as easily as possible.

Most West Devon residents are able to interact with us online, and we have taken proactive steps to make our website easy to use. We have also implemented online accessibility tools to help as many people as possible to find online support. We encourage a digital first approach – which means that residents can carry out tasks with the Council 24 hours a day, seven days a week. However, we are aware that some residents in West Devon, whether by choice or due to the lack of internet access in rural area, do not have internet access. For these residents, we will do all we can to assist them to access Council services in alternate ways.

We will ensure that West Devon residents will be consistently updated regarding Council business and services, and any local issues involving the Council – putting our community at the centre of our communications.

We will continue to be a Council that takes pride in listening and responding to our residents' concerns, ideas and aspirations.



Cllr Jeff Moody

Lead Member for
Accessibility and
Communications

Our Primary Aims

1. To communicate the work of the Council and how it benefits our communities.
2. To strive for, and achieve, a high level of customer satisfaction.

Our Initial Actions

- Digital Accessibility 24/7 – Continuing Website enhancement, continuing to give customers around the clock access to Council services online.
- For those residents who are unable to access Council services digitally or by phone, we will offer, where necessary, a Face to Face service. This service will be promoted through key partners such as Citizens Advice.
- Proactively and continuously improve our customer communication channels so they are fully accessible and inclusive for all residents.
- Continuous review of our new Consultation & Engagement Portal.
- Engage with our community through Customer Satisfaction Surveys.
- Provide a planned programme of regular ‘Customer Engagement Roadshow Events’ to promote Council Services and to obtain feedback from residents.
- Implement a regular ‘information programme’ featuring important Council information through the local press, online videos, social media and various digital platforms.

Our contribution to a global blueprint

Adopted by the United Nations Members States in 2015, the sustainable development goals provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet now and into the future.

They are an urgent call to action by all countries, recognising that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. This plan directly contributes to 11 of the 17 goals as highlighted throughout the document.



West Devon
Borough
Council

SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

West Devon Borough Council supports the Sustainable Development Goals

Want to know more?
<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

www.westdevon.gov.uk