



January 2026

Report from DCC Cllr Louise Wainwright (Salcombe Division)

Debrief Meeting – following Gas Emergency January 2026

The date is now confirmed as **Friday 6th March, 10.00 am to 1.00 pm** to be held at Malborough Hall TQ7 3SN. Please **RSVP** to me louise.wainwright@devon.gov.uk if your councillors and/or clerks wish to attend. This is not a public meeting. Good parking and easy access.

The purpose of the meeting is to appreciate the complexity of a coordinated emergency response of this scale and ensure all partners are prepared and able to be involved from the outset. It is anticipated that this will be an opportunity to benefit from lessons learned during the Gas Emergency and to thank all those who worked together to keep our communities safe.

Invites have also gone to South Hams District Councillors and County Councillors who can decide whether to extend the invitation to their parish/town councils who were not directly involved with the Gas Emergency but may wish to benefit from the opportunity to consider how their local Emergency Plans could be improved.

The draft Programme/Agenda is as follows: Registration. Welcome & purpose of Meeting (Cllr Louise Wainwright) Delegates Introductions; Presentations from – Wales & West Utilities (Gwynn Thomas), Local Resilience Forum (Niki Glew), Devon Communities Together (Rod Birtles), SHDC (to be confirmed), DCC (to be confirmed). Questions from the Delegates (Chaired by Cllr Jasper Evans Salcombe Town Council) Joint Agreement on 'Lessons Learned' and how to embed these.

If you are aware of any interested parties who have not yet been invited – please ask them to contact me. louise.wainwright@devon.gov.uk Thank you.

Neighbourhood Plans and National Housing Targets

Modbury Parish Council has raised concerns about the status of their Neighbourhood Plan following an unexpected revelation, at a recent SHDC Development Management Committee meeting on the 77-home property development plan from Bloor Homes. Their NHP was **no longer deemed 'Protected'** which apparently made the defined **Development Boundary**, no longer valid and the related **Policy** could not be used to make an Objection to a housing development. District Councillors present abstained from the vote and the Application was approved, despite considerable local concerns about Highways access through an earlier phase Bloor Homes development over a three-year building period.

I have been invited by Cllr Dan Thomas (leader of SHDC) to meet with SHDC Head of Planning to better understand the issues including: the actual **numbers of houses** that HM Government demands must be built in South Hams over the **next five years**: the **total land currently identified** for this in South, **implications** of not meeting the target within next 5 years because not enough land has been identified and the process of **involving town and parish councils in this process** more effectively. More to follow.

Salcombe Division Parish Assembly – Saturday 28th March 10.00 am to 1.00 pm
Modbury QE2 Hall, PL21 0FS (good parking – easy access)

This meeting is confirmed. All parish and town councils are invited. Please RSVP.
Thank you.

The purpose is to bring together a collective view on how to **respond** to any forthcoming **public consultation** on the proposed Local Government Reorganisation and the boundary changes. Our primary purpose is to consolidate our views on how we would like the **Neighbourhood Area Committees to receive and respond to the views of parish and town councils** and how we want to be **represented**.

I am finalising the Agenda and will circulate during February ahead of my February monthly report. Modbury Parish Council is conferring with **DALC**; I am discussing with representatives of **Cornwall County Council** and **Somerset County Council** about how they can best share their views with us and take questions in advance.

I have the **DCC proposal** to HM Government in full and will share this with Clerks for forwarding to councillors. I will seek the **SHDC proposal** and share this in advance too so that all councils can include this as an Agenda item at previous council meeting for full participation. Both documents refer to either the **Neighbourhood Area Committees** or the **Community Hubs** and this forms the basis of our discussions at The Salcombe Parish Assembly. I am confirming participation from SHDC and DCC at this meeting. More to follow.

Highways

Potholes continue to be a very fraught and contentious issue at all levels of local government – County Council, District Council and Parish/Town Councils. Deterioration has accelerated after three consecutive named storms.

Delivery of an improved service is constrained by the existing **legal contract with Milestone** which **expires in March 2027**. Nothing can change substantially until then because it would be a **breach of contract**. Milestone (“Highways”) is responsible for local road repairs.

Milestone offers a **centralised service**, which it delivers through a network of **subcontractors**. There is a measurable margin involved immediately with any

subcontractor involvement. I question whether any of this margin could be strategically deployed more cost effectively through parish councils. Ongoing investigation. Certain aspects of the Milestone rural service are probably more expensive to deliver than they could be from a **locally based service provider**. For example, whilst the DCC ‘**defect potholes only**’ policy prevails, the funding might be more cost-effectively channelled through parish councils and the Road Warden Scheme in collaboration with the Neighbourhood Highways Officer. It is my expectation that the same budget could go further because the delivery teams are **already in the locality** and have the **flexibility** to undertake works when the **weather is suitable**. We have some potholes fixed by local Road Wardens and their volunteers that are still serviceable after two years.

Whilst “Highways” (e.g. Milestone) are working at pace to fill all the Reported potholes over the winter months – the enormity of the task and the vast area involved means that the **weather and timing** is not always favourable to **ensure the longevity** of any emergency repairs undertaken. There are frequent reports of potholes being fixed and then washing out soon afterwards, having to be re-fixed at taxpayers’ expense.

Quality issues about pothole repairs which do not last, continue to concern me. Quality issues can be referred to the **Ombudsman** and evidence of poor quality might justify a new approach to funding local repairs and maintenance. Please note the **caveat** above about the pressure to undertake work when weather conditions are not conducive to a long-lasting fix. I am sure there is a cost attached to bringing in an Ombudsman. I need to explore how this evidence can be gathered and evaluated cost effectively.

Whilst the existing Milestone contract must play out, this does not prevent parish councils from **designing** and **proposing a new funding strategy** on local road repairs and maintenance for consideration by DCC before March 2027. **Inter-parish cooperation** on this would amplify local opinion and justify proposals for policy changes. Policy changes at DCC require a **Motion** to be debated by **Full Council**. If I had the support of **Salcombe Division parish councils** in this endeavour, it provides me with the mandate to lobby for improvements that can be **funded within the existing highways budget**.

This would require public consultation, gathering of local evidence and informed practical proposals from **Road Wardens**. I am proactively engaging with Road Wardens and parish councils with the support of my **Neighbourhood Highways Officer** and the cabinet member for Highways, **Cllr Dan Thomas** – to identify opportunities to make our existing budget more cost effective.

I agree that we should not rely on volunteers alone to deliver local repairs. I have secured a promise from **Cllr Dan Thomas, cabinet member for Highways**, that he will come to meet the **full Salcombe Division Road Wardens group** to explore practical suggestions about how local road repairs and maintenance should be triaged, prioritised, supervised, undertaken – and **funded**

A **Road Warden** is an existing volunteer role, like Tree Wardens and Footpath Wardens, supported by DCC funds. It is primarily a **coordinators role**, although sometimes the Road Warden also undertakes the practical work too. **Road Wardens have teams of trained, supervised volunteers** to undertake the work agreed with the DCC Neighbourhood Highways Officer. The programme is described in the Handbook below.

I have completed the first draft of a **Highways & Footpath Handbook for Parish Councils** which is now being reviewed by **Cllr Dan Thomas** (DCC cabinet Member for Highways) and our **Neighbourhood Highways Officer**. This could be agreed and published before the end of February. It includes initiatives that I have taken in the Salcombe Division and signposts the issues and options that I now understand because of the great help I have had from my Neighbourhood Highways Officer.

Together with parish and town councils we have piloted the first round of the **Parish Highways Priority Lists (PHPL)**. I recognise that our feedback needs to be more formalised and there are improvements to be made. I will co-develop a formal **PHPL evidence and response table** to replace the series of email responses to the PHPL which makes it difficult to track. Thank you for your patience.

Helping SEND families

Thank you to **Modbury PC** for letting me use their council offices on Saturday 24th January to hold a surgery for families with SEND children in neighbouring parishes. As a result, we have begun the process of bringing families and local practitioners together in a WhatsApp group to facilitate communication about face-to-face meetings. Modbury PC have again offered their council office to hold these meetings. Together, we will agree priorities for funding small relevant initiatives that support their needs. **Caroline Voaden MP** and **Cllr Denise Bickley** (DCC cabinet member for SEND) are taking an interest in this initiative and we have the opportunity to lobby for changes needed to the process of supporting SEND families more cost-effectively and in a meaningful way that make a difference to our families.

Locality Funds

All locality funds must be spent by 31st March 2026. There is some debate at Full Council about being able to roll over unspent funding into the next financial year. I am hoping all my funds will be allocated by then. There is also some talk about increasing the Locality Budget going forward. More on this soon.

Thank you

Thank you to all the Clerks and Chairs in the Salcombe Division for their continued support.

Cllr Louise Wainwright

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