Monthly Report September 2026

Cllr Louise Wainwright (Devon County Council – Salcombe Division)

A week is a long time in politics.

Two BIG announcements:

1. **Local Government Reorganisation** (see Summary LGR and Appendix 1)
2. **Reimbursement by Government of DCC £191,252,023 debt due to SEND provision overspend and borrowing.** (see Summary SEND Reimbursement & Appendix 2)

Please read the Appendices: Understanding the different tiers of local government helps parish and town councils consider how future decisions about services will be made and what their role will be.

Also in this monthly report: (see relevant SUMMARIES)

3. **Highways**
4. **South West Water**
5. **Devon Farms Estate**
6. **SEND interactions**
7. **Water Quality**
8. **Climate Emergency**
9. **Communications**

SUMMARY LGR

1. On Monday last week **DCC submitted** its legal representation to Government of what would be in its **Judicial Review** over the earlier boundary decisions in the Local Government Reorganisation.

2. Within three days, the Chief Executive of Devon County Council was informed by Government that **Local Government Reorganisation is not considered possible for Devon**. We are now on the **Red List**, perceived as too complex to proceed

3. DCC will not need to spend £250,000 to proceed with a full Judicial Review.

4. **Devon County Council** and the **District Councils** are **no longer being abolished**

5. DCC will be posting an interim **bill of £4 million** to Government to recoup some of its costs for LGR preparedness. Further rebates will be pursued.

6. **Devolution** is now the focus (not LGR). This involves the **Strategic Mayoral Authority** (with an elected Mayor) together with a more democratic model for the **Combined County Authority**. This is the structure for PM Andy Burnham's, '**Re-Wiring of the State**' model to devolve budgets and responsibility to regional Mayoral Authorities. More details in **Appendix 1.**

7. It is critical that we are in no doubt that Re-Wiring the State will not put more money into **local services managed by DCC and District Councils.** They will **remain under-funded**. Improved services will only come from **Partnerships between District Councils, County Council and Parish Councils**. We need to make council tax go further by cooperating between all tiers of local government, including parish & town councils.

8. Devolution will require DCC to devise the constitution for the **Neighbourhood Area Committees** which will be debated and voted on by DCC Cabinet and at Full Council, possibly in December.

9. The initial three meetings held (25/26) within Salcombe Division about NACs and Local Area Hubs (**Salcombe Assemblies)** have provided a meaningful platform for **ongoing debate about local partnership** at the parish/town council level. It is important for lower tier councils to raise the profile of their communities to ensure **local needs can be quantified and budgets for services prioritise fairly**. I will be calling another **Salcombe Assembly** shortly once the Agenda has been agreed with stakeholders. Contact me if you want to be involved at an early stage. Thank you to those who have already contacted me to offer support.

10. See **Appendix 1** for more details

SUMMARY Re-imbursement of SEND Debt

1. The Government has given a vote of confidence in Devon's progress on SEND, approving the **DCC reform plan** and announcing an indicative **£191m grant to repay 90% of the council's accumulated overspend** on SEND up to the end of 2025/26.
2. The grant relates to **historic expenditure** that has already been incurred through **Devon's DSG deficit** and the costs associated with financing it. It

is not additional funding available for new SEND services or other council spending.

3. Many County Councils did not have their strategic plans approved. Under the new **Liberal Democrat** adminsitration, **Cllr Denise Bickley** (Cabinet Member for SEND) and Officers have developed a meaningful plan about how to improve services within the existing budget. See **Appendix 2** for more details.

HIGHLIGHTS HIGHWAYS

My work across Devon, reinvigorating the **Road Warden Scheme**, continues to pay dividends as more volunteers are stepping forward with the support of their parish and town councils. Some parishes have now **reported** all **Devon County Potholes** (previously called 'Defect Potholes which DCC must legally fix) and they have **been fixed by DCC**.

The same parishes have an active Road Warden team that have filled all the **Community Potholes** (previously termed 'non-defect' potholes – that DCC cannot afford to fill and have no legal obligation to fill). So, they are going into the winter with the **pothole back log cleared**.

The cabinet member for Highways, advises that **DCC investment in surface dressing** can only go ahead when all potholes are fixed (both types). Parishes can shift local roads up the **priority list for surface dressing**, once they have partnered with DCC to get all potholes sorted and drains cleared. A surface **dressing protects a road for up to 8 years.**

At **DALC Conference** next week, DCC will be profiling the Road Warden Scheme and launching the **new Road Warden portal** where all the erroneously reported Devon County Potholes (which were Community Potholes) will be posted. This allows Road Wardens to view where most of the Community Potholes are located, so they can prioritise work after liaising with their Neighbourhood Highways Officer. I am asking for more work to be done on this parallel Road Warden Portal to facilitate Road Wardens to mark all Community Potholes directly and to change the colour of the pin when the Community Pothole is fixed. Eventually there will be a means of **aligning all this information** to allow Highways **to prioritise the Common Sense Approach** (if trials indicate savings)

The **Common Sense Approach six-month trial** ends this month. This was about Highways teams **fixing a FEW adjacent Community Potholes near Devon County Potholes** at the same time to save money. More information to follow.

Savings made overall by the Lib Dem Administration in 2025/26 allowed an extra **£3 million** to be allocated **this winter to the Rapid Response Team** (to fix vertical edged Devon County Potholes). It also allowed **£4 million** to be invested this winter into the road **Serviceability Works** – which **patches areas of worn road before a pothole develop**s. Neighbourhood Highways Officers should be identifying areas in their Division where a Serviceability Team can be spent for **one day per month**.

Our **Neighbourhood Highways Officer has reached out to all Clerks** to organise a second round of **Highways Priorities site visits** in each of the 16 parishes in Salcombe Division. Please can all Clerks respond so that we can complete this over the winter months. Thank you.

Road Wardens can also be provided with equipment to **clear drains to keep water off the roads**. Water on roads, particularly during cycles of freezing and thawing, **cause new potholes**. Greater public awareness about the need to keep drains clear will mean fewer garage bills and avoid serious accidents caused by any type of pothole. The **Super El Nino** this winter means there will be more water on the roads and more misery, when flooding occurs. Parish councils can help by promoting the **DCC Report a Problem** link and understanding that DCC will only come and clear the drain if there has been standing water for three days, after the rain has stopped.

Prevention is better than cure and some parish councils are already asking Road Wardens to inspect drains and check the **DCC interactive drain clearing timetable for each listed drain,** and confirm with the Neighbourhood Highways Officer, when each drain is timetabled to have its **annual or 3-yearly clearance**. Some parishes are paying for a **jetting to be done as an interim** measure. **Litter picking** also helps prevent blocked drains.

Farmers and landowners are legally obliged to ensure gullies are clear and that water from roads can flow onto their land. Parish councils can help raise awareness and encourage landowners to help with this.

I appreciate this is not always easy for parish councils to recruit volunteers, and certain councils have continued problems with their insurers for Road Wardens.

However, there are ways of resolving this. One is to **employ a contractor** with their **own insurance and appropriate Signing Lighting and Guarding qualifications**. The PC can then agree with the DCC Road Warden Scheme for supplies of cold lay and to work closely with the Neighbourhood Highways

Officer to ensure full governance and compliance in the use of materials provided by taxpayers.

Please contact me if you have any queries. Huge thanks to all those who have been able to make a difference in their parishes.

HIGHLIGHTS: River Pollution and Water Quality

I have contributed two casework issues (SWW asset management) to the Agenda for **Cllr Julian Brazil** and **Cllr Paul Arnott** (cabinet member for water quality) when they meet with the **new CEO of South West Water** (St Anns Chapel and Blackawton STW). I am asking the CEO to consider working with local **land owners paying them** to set up **reedbeds to clean up over spills** instead of letting it pollute our rivers or paying £2000 per day to transport companies to move raw sewage from St Anns Chapel to Kingsbridge STW every day/night. Feedback to follow.

I have almost finished preparing a Devon-wide data base of sources of **pollution for all waterbodies in Devon** (agriculture vs SWW) with **maps of the parishes** through which the streams, tributaries and rivers run. I have had help from Richard Powell in the making of the parish catchment maps and my granddaughter in the development of the **interactive tables with click links** to the relevant EA Catchment Explorer data for **all water bodies in Devon.** This will form the basis for a break out session at the **Devon Water Quality Conference** for 200 invited stakeholders in **Exeter on 17th November**.

The above information will be published in a **booklet to enable parishes to work collectively along a catchment** to engage with parishioners, land owners, farmers and SWW to improve our water quality through behaviour change (e.g. poo pee and paper only down the loo) and preventing runoff into rivers. It is envisaged that County Councillors will begin promoting this will all their parish councils in Devon.

The Government has set a deadline of 2027 for all rivers to be of Good Ecological status. We need a plan.

HIGHLIGHTS DEVON FARMS ESTATE

I am thrilled that now that LGR has dropped of the Agenda, The Devon Farms Estate will not run the risk of land near what was to be 'Greater Plymouth", "Greater Exeter' and Greater Torbay' to be sold off for building plots. We will

continue to provide unique opportunities for new entrants to come into farming though our portfolio of 61 start-up and progression farms.

I have continued my work as Vice Chair of Devon Farms Estate, with a full programme of monitoring visits across Devon, reviewing business plans of new applicants, interviewing them, attending DFE Committee Meetings and other events.

I will be using some of my **Locality Budget** to fund **Farm Wise** school workshops in some of the schools in Salcombe Division - to make school children more aware of where their food comes from and the importance of farming to Devon.

HIGHLIGHTS - SEND interactions

I am continuing my work with local families with children with SEND to understand the difficulties in accessing and providing services. I will be contributing to the **debate about how DCC can now begin to put in place its agreed strategic plan to improve services**.

This is now more realistic since the massive debt has been cleared. I will be **visiting schools** that serve our area to find out what they need to help them fulfil the need for them to be as **inclusive as possible**. I will also be talking to **groups of parents and the volunteer sector** to explore how **community self-help can fill some of the gaps**. I also recognise that parents and classroom assistants also need peer support to cope with the demands placed on them. I am keen to explore what opportunities there are for **holiday support** to be provided to SEND children.

HIGHLIGHTS – CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Many parishes have now screened the **People's Emergency Briefing** Film. I am reaching out to all these parishes, to find out what they believe the **NEXT STEPS** are.

COMMUNICATIONS

I will be **answering emails on a Tuesday and Thursday** each week unless its urgent – in which case please send me a text message **07908 525663** to alert me to read an email.

I will be having an operation in the next month and could be out of circulation for a couple of weeks. I will alert Clerks when dates are confirmed. I will still be able to answer emails and calls but will be less mobile.

It would be helpful if you would kindly put the word **ACTION or FYI** in the **subject box for an email** so that I can prioritise which emails to attend to first.

Thank you for all the work you do for your parish and town councils.

Appendix 1 **Re-Wiring the State explained** (ref Cllr Paul Arnott DCC cabinet member for LGR and Cllr Caroline Leaver)

The **"Rewiring the State" Cabinet Statement**, published by the **UK Government Cabinet Office** on **July 31, 2026**, outlines a sweeping, radical plan to decentralize the British state.

Under the new premiership of Prime Minister Andy Burnham, the policy aims to shift power, funding, and decision-making away from Westminster and Whitehall directly to local leaders and metro mayors across England. A **comprehensive white paper** detailing the exact implementation timeline is scheduled for publication in autumn 2026.

Core Structure & Timetable

The policy aims to complete the devolution map of England by establishing **strategic authorities** across every region:

- **By the end of 2028** (with an ambition for 2027), strategic combined authorities will be established in every area of England.
- **"Devolve by default"** will become the core operating model for central government, transitioning Whitehall into a smaller, more strategic entity.

Fiscal Devolution & Tax Reform

In what is considered the most significant constitutional change in the package, the government is **moving away from centralized grants** to grant councils greater financial independence:

- **Local Income Tax:** Starting in **April 2028**, central government grants will be replaced, allowing mayors to retain a direct share of local income tax.
- **Business Rates:** Mayors will fully retain their share of local business rates starting **April 2027**.
- **New Revenue Powers:** Local authorities will gain new revenue-raising abilities, including the power to implement an **Overnight Visitor Levy** by March 2028.

Public Services & Local Infrastructure

Mayors and strategic authorities will take over direct management of key sectors to better integrate public services:

- **Education & Skills:** Local control over 16–19 education budgets and vocational/technical funding, alongside devolved employment support.
- **Transport:** Commuter rail networks will come under mayoral control, and bus services will move to public control with integrated ticketing systems. The threshold for local approval of transport schemes will be raised to **£500 million**.
- **Housing & Energy:** Expanded regional authority over housebuilding, local energy infrastructure, innovation, and cultural investments.
- **Emergency Services & Health:** Increased democratic control over local public services, stretching from health and policing to fire governance, primarily through new Deputy Mayor roles.

Accountability Changes
To ensure transparency with the transfer of large budgets, the governance structure is being reformed:

- Chief executives of mayoral strategic authorities will be designated as **Local Accounting Officers**.
- They will hold formal, statutory responsibility for the proper use of public money and value-for-money metrics, mirroring the structure used by permanent secretaries in Whitehall.

Comment from Cllr LW:

The LGR submission took huge commitment from Officers at Devon County Council and those at District Councils who worked like super heroes with the LGR lead elected Councillors to meet deadlines with high-quality strategic plans. I must bring to your attention the massive workloads of **Cllr Paul Arnott** and **Cllr Julian Brazil** who have worked tirelessly and with great political astuteness to navigate the complex and competing interests of neighbouring councils. They have achieved this for the people of Devon at great personal expense.

This is what is possible when voters elect Liberal Democrats who are a capable, experienced team of dedicated individuals who focus on partnership and can work with our Officers to reform our strategic approach to service delivery where budgets are very tight. The **Lib Dem-led South Hams District Council** and **South West Devon Council** have been able to **save £6 million per year** because they agreed to share some key senior management positions and work collectively to deliver services.

Leader of SHDC, **Cllr Dan Thomas** says "What we have learned (from the LGR journey) is that there is a clear appetite in Devon for **'Evolution rather than Revolution**' and councils are now working towards securing the necessary mandates from their members (where there is a genuine desire) for **all tiers to work closer together**. To that end, further discussions are shortly intended to take place on **NACs with relevant stakeholders.**

Cllr Thomas explains "The Combined County Authority was the first iteration of a higher tier of devolved strategic powers. Set up by the previous county Tory administration in conjunction with the incumbent Torbay Tory administration, those 2 bodies **hold all 6 of the statutory voting positions**. The Districts are currently 'represented' by 2 Leaders, but they are **unable to vote** on any matter of significance. There are other seats at the table for the **Police & Crime Commission** as well as representatives from **education** and **business**.

Cllr Thomas says "**Mayoral Strategic Authorities** (the next, forthcoming iteration) appear very much to be the mood music of the current government about the direction of devolution across England. The model has been tried and tested by the PM when he was Mayor of Greater Manchester: his Cabinet being made up of the leaders and chief executives of the various constituent councils in the GM area.

Strategic Authorities & Devon & Torbay County Combined Authority Summary (ref Cllr Caroline Leaver)

The Role of Strategic Authorities

Strategic Authorities serve as the **primary vehicle for devolution**.
They do not replace local councils but act as an upper-tier regional body designed to pull powers away from central government. Their main roles include:

- **Fiscal Management:** Holding direct responsibility for local accounting. They will manage substantial devolved budgets and eventually retain shares of local income taxes and business rates.

- **Public Transport Commissioning:** Acting as the overarching Local Transport Authority to manage regional rail, bus networks, and major infrastructure schemes.

- **Macro Economic Strategy:** Controlling large-scale regional investment funds, vocational training programs, innovation grants, and public housing targets.

- **Emergency & Health Democratic Control:** Oversight of regional police, fire services, and public health collaboration.

The Role of the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (DTCCA)

The DTCCA is a legally recognized body formed as a **partnership between Devon County Council and Torbay Counci**l. Under the English Devolution White Paper, it operates as a "Foundation Strategic Authority".

Unlike larger metro regions (like Greater Manchester), the DTCCA does not have a directly elected mayor and is instead led by a board of local council leaders. Its core operational responsibilities include:

- **Adult Skills & Education:** Managing the devolved Adult Education Budget and allocating funding locally for business-aligned training and youth skills (including a dedicated capital fund).

- **Strategic Transport:** Acting as the statutory Local Transport Authority for the sub-region, coordinating public transport infrastructure, and commissioning upgrades.

- **Housing Provision:** Accelerating affordable housing projects and setting joint land-use policies to combat the region's unique rural/coastal housing affordability pressures.

- **Economic & Green Growth:** Deploying central government capital funding toward net-zero energy projects, marine/environmental innovation, and business growth.

Devon & Torbay Combined County Combined Authority (DTCCA) Board Composition & Decision-Making (ref Cllr Caroline Leaver)

Because the DTCCA operates without a central mayor, power is shared via a **cooperative board governance structure**.

Board Members
The board consists of **12 seats** spanning political and non-political local leaders:

- **Chair:** Cllr David Thomas (Leader of Torbay Council, Conservative)
- **Vice-Chair:** Cllr Julian Brazil (Leader of Devon County Council, Liberal Democrat)
- **Other Constituent Members:** Cllr Chris Lewis (Torbay), Cllr Swithin Long (Torbay), Cllr Paul Arnott (Devon), and Cllr Michael Fife Cook (Devon).
- **Non-Constituent & Associate Members:** Local district forum representatives (including Exeter Council Leader Cllr Phil Bialyk and Cllr Ken James), Police and Crime Commissioner Alison Hernandez, and business/skills chairs Alan Dykes and Laurence Frewin.

How Decisions Are Made

- **Voting Rights:** Only the **constituent members** representing the upper-tier councils (**Devon County** and **Torbay**) hold **voting power** over core strategies, budgets, and major policies. Non-constituent and associate members (District councils, Police and Crime Commissioner, and the businesses and skills chairs) act in an **advisory capacity**.

- **Voting Thresholds:** To pass any major decision, it requires a majority of constituent members present to vote in favour. Crucially, this majority must include both Lead Members (the political leaders of Devon and Torbay), effectively granting both councils a **mutual veto** to ensure absolute consensus.

Appendix 2 : Re-imbursement of SEND Debt

The Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care said it recognised the progress made by partners across education, health and local government in developing a shared plan to improve support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The approval means Devon County Council is eligible to receive a High Needs Stability Grant covering 90 per cent of its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit accrued up to the end of the 2025-26 financial year, with an indicative allocation of £191.3 million, subject to final confirmation.

The grant relates to historic expenditure that has already been incurred through Devon's DSG deficit and the costs associated with financing it. It is not additional funding available for new SEND services or other council spending.

Ministers said the approval recognises the commitment shown by Devon's local area partnership to reform and provides a foundation from which it can move into the delivery phase of its improvement programme.

Councillor Denise Bickley, Devon County Council's Cabinet Member for SEND, said:

"This is a significant moment for Devon and a strong vote of confidence in the improvement journey we have been on.

"It has been a long road to get to this stage and there have been difficult days alongside the successes. Throughout that journey, our focus has remained firmly on improving support and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families.

"Government's approval of our reform plan recognises the hard work and commitment of staff, schools, health partners, parent carers and everyone involved in driving improvement across Devon. It recognises we have developed a strong plan for improvement and are making progress in the right direction.

"Our partnership with government has been an important part of that journey. We have welcomed both the support and challenge we have received and appreciate the confidence ministers have shown in our plans.

"While this announcement is very welcome, we know there is more to do. We are only part of the way along the improvement road but this is telling us clearly that

we are going in the right direction – we have done a huge amount to get the foundations strong so now we need to pick up the pace. Approval of the plan is an important milestone, but we must now continue to demonstrate successful delivery and tangible improvements for children, young people and families.

"Demand for SEND services continues to grow nationally and sustained government investment in schools, health partners and early years services, combined with curriculum restructuring and Ofsted judging schools by their ability to be inclusive, will be essential if local areas are to continue improving support over the long term."

Councillor James Buczkowski, Devon County Council's Cabinet Member for Finance and Public Value, said the announcement could significantly improve the council's financial position.

"This is a significant announcement for Devon because it addresses historic SEND expenditure and the financial pressures associated with carrying and financing the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit," he said.

"It is important to be clear that this is not £191.3 million of new funding available to spend on SEND services or any other council service. The grant would cover 90 per cent of the accumulated DSG deficit up to the end of 2025-26, helping to relieve the financial pressures created by that historic expenditure.

"We are now assessing the implications in more detail. While it is too early to quantify the impact, this has the potential to make a **significant difference to the council's financial position through reducing the costs associated with financing the deficit.**

"We welcome the Government's recognition of the work undertaken by Devon's local area partnership and look forward to continuing our improvement journey."

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