

Report on a presentation given by the Leader of Devon County Council Councillor John Hart followed by a Q&A session.

Cllr Hart thanked the meeting for the invitation which he considered to be very timely as once again there were difficult choices to be made. Devon County Council had already had their funding reduced by £100m which meant they had reduced management and done things differently. There had not been much difference in the services and no increase in council tax for 3 consecutive years and they had aimed at maintaining specifics like highway maintenance and dementia care. Over the next 4 years DCC have to take out another £100m and they will have to do things totally different to what they did before as they cannot make the same type of savings which means they will have to stop providing certain services. There will have to be some very serious decisions taken. Cllr Hart had given out a guide showing the amount of money that DCC spend on the various services and under every heading there are some mandatory things that have to be done.

They had previously made a great pledge that they would close no libraries and they are still open, but perhaps with different opening hours. DCC may well be consulting with the smallest of the libraries and ask communities if they would like to run it for them and if this does happen they could save a few hundred thousand pounds.

There are 43 children centres in Devon to which national government reduced funding. DCC has made up the difference but they are not sure if they will be able to carry on doing this anymore so they may also be consulting to find out where the centres are needed most, and DCC may not be able to continue to fund them all.

The number of people using DCC day care centres has dropped by 35% in the last five years. This is because some users take their own personal payments and partly because other organisations are offering services which the users pay a small amount for. Where these day centres are not busy, DCC can no longer afford to keep open a centre that is running at a heavy loss and is already consulting on this. With regard to care homes, DCC will be looking at these closely as many people would rather look after themselves and be independent, and building extra care housing may well be what is required for the future.

Another service DCC are looking at is the Youth Service. DCC need to concentrate on those young people that are not engaged with the community or already in trouble with the law, so DCC need to work with the youth offending service and others. Cllr Hart said that they couldn't guarantee to run the weekly youth clubs and may well be looking for volunteers and asking parents to come in and help run these clubs. The Youth Services sees between 2-3,000 young people which costs 7m a year.

DCC will also be looking at rural transport as this is subsidised by £6m a year by DCC; most people have a bus pass which costs £6m over and above what the government gives DCC every year. However, 19% of people in Devon do not have a private car or private transport and 21% rely on a bus to get them to and from work. At a meeting in Torridge the message Cllr Hart gave was "use it or lose it" because if the bus companies go to DCC and ask for help in running the services, then DCC may say "what services can you provide with the money you have?".

Q&A Session

Q1. Janet Crocker, Exeter: The County Council via its Director of Adult Social Care awards home care contracts to various agencies. How are these monitored and how often are they checked to see what standards of home care is delivered?

A1. As DCC award the contracts and you have a complaint you must tell us and we will reassess the contract. DCC does not monitor on a day to day basis.

Q2. Margaret Woolacott, on behalf of the Okehampton branch: You recently wrote a letter to the government with regard to rural funding. Have you had a reply and if so, can you tell us what it was?

A2. They hadn't realised their comments were opaque around the funding. DCC have a 15% reduction - they said 2.5%. £3.8bn for health will be given either directly or indirectly but the health service are saying we will only get it if they can save it. Business rates had been top sliced and we are in negotiations regarding the new homes bonus. If we get economic growth in the county and get a small portion of money we will be reasonably OK, but the government may decide to give it to Local Enterprise Partnerships. DCC used to have the freedom to do what it wanted to do, so yes, I did have an answer but not a satisfactory one.

Q3. David Tarbox-Cooper, Okehampton branch: I am sure you are aware that Devon is a very rural county and that many of its population are elderly. Rural isolation is an increasing problem so can you give us any assurance that transport will be protected from any further cuts?

A3. If you remove transport, people need other services to support them through isolation. An example is in Torrridge where you can get a bus to the see the doctor but you can't get back again. DCC are doing a review in community transport and I think this is going to come to the fore more in rural areas. Public transport is being used less therefore you get less. The older, established community services are doing well, but new ones are having to work harder with less County Council Grant. David Tarbox-Cooper asked if DCC monitored those that provide the services eg double decker between Bideford and Winkleigh? The fact is the companies know their onward links, so a small bus may not link into a larger used route. DCC do monitor the number of people that are on the buses.

Q4. Sally Lougher, Executive administrator: We are consistently being told by DCC and central government that it is "over to your communities" to provide and initiate voluntary projects in our localities to fill the gaps and yet, Devon Senior Voice which has been established for six years, is an extremely cheap organisation to run and has a raft of volunteers at our disposal and cannot secure funding from trust and grant giving organisations because it is not a service provider. We have been running at a deficit of £30,000 for the past two years and will find ourselves bankrupt by next year. What advice do you have to offer us?

A4. I will take back this question to my officers and talk to them, but they do talk to the community voluntary sector which Devon Senior Voice is part of. I do note the value of what you do and that your volunteers wear many of hats.

Q5. Frances Canning, Exeter: DCC is not a housing authority so how are you going to manage the extra care housing?

A5. DCC will work with partners who do manage housing.

Q6. Tony Langmead, Exeter: From the press it was reported that DCC has a "cash" reserve fund of £100m, whereas Exeter City Council is £6m. Will you be reducing this substantial reserve to accommodate a cushion against the proposed cuts?

A6. DCC has £14m reserves. We have over a number of years built up further dedicated reserves. We have also, with Partners, started to build extra care houses in Okehampton, Bideford, and Tiverton etc. and we need to get sharper in the way we do things. The government says local government are sitting on £2bn amount of reserves which is rubbish - we do sit on money that is unspent by education but it is

not ours to spend. There is a government formula for school funding – but it does not cover areas like DCC as it is too restrictive. Ministers did the sums and said that DCC can run the formula differently. £30-40m is held in the bank for the schools but this is not reserves – we have £14m cash reserves.

Q7. John Montgomery, Ivybridge: Is school transport being affected by the cuts?

A7. This comes under the local authority and DCC bus about 22,000 young people (25% of school age pupils) to their place of education. The formal rules are free travel for up to 8 years old if they live more than 2 miles from school and for the over 8s, 3 miles. DCC's rules are 2 miles on primary aged children and 3 miles to school on secondary aged children, as we thought it nonsense if you have two children from the same home and one is 7 who gets free transport and the 10 year old doesn't.

Q8. Yvonne Wardrop, Exmouth: Greater use of the DCC website for giving information may cut costs but there is little point in suggesting non-e users go to libraries for internet help when those are threatened with closures. Where can the tax payers get the information then? We are not all silver surfers!

A8. I haven't said we would close libraries but suggest communities might take some over. Local libraries have Free Fridays and trained staff to help people particularly with welfare charges. Health professionals take 1.5 hours to fill out these forms so what chance do the public have. If you can't go into a library and are not a silver surfer I suggest you go to a night class and learn. From the floor: no public transport to the classes. JH - Those people who have taken up the iPad have a totally different lifestyle but we are doing our best within the library services and DCC does have our call centre too. There has been a 17% drop in attendance at libraries over the last 12 months. We have added job clubs and learning disability centres to some of the libraries so we get better value from our buildings, but we do have a lot of very old and tired buildings. If we can sell off 5 or 6 old buildings we can build one new one with all the facilities. There is a consultation out now regarding mobile libraries and at the moment 5,000+ use library service but 150 will not get the service to their doorstep. We will monitor this very carefully and your local mobile library and services are safe so long as you have a reasonable number of people using them. DCC also has 3,000 less people working for them than in 2009.

Q9. David Snelling, Ivybridge: As the Care Bill is currently being debated in parliament there is expectation that all local authorities promote wellbeing within their communities. How do you feel about the inconsistencies, creating apprehension, anxiety, dissatisfaction and a lower of standards, of the zero hour contract being used by providers of domiciliary care?

A9. DCC are not using zero hour contracts. There are only a small number of employees who are and it suits us and it suits the person. As far as I am aware there are none in domiciliary care and would like to know if there are any cases. Some people are on standby when we need them and they are not regular employees but only when they are available and we can pay them as they are on the payment system. I will ask many how zero hour contracts there are on domiciliary care.

Q10. Peter Spackman, Dawlish: Devon Senior Voice was inaugurated as an independent organisation to express the issues, cares and concerns of the over-50s. How can we continue if we are required to conform to DCC policy?

A10. I didn't know Devon Senior Voice are supposed to conform to DCC standards. All organisations have independent minds and give independent reports. SL said that DSV contributes through the Engagement and Healthwatch Devon contract. JH - no one is telling you what you have to do. I have always heard what you have to say and listened to you, not told you what to do. PS wrote an article for the July newsletter and it was impounded by DCC because of a view expressed in it did not conform to DCC policy. JH was given a copy and he will then have an idea what it was about and will take back. SL

explained that DCC raised concerns and DSV put a note on the website that views were not that of the Board or staff and that the July newsletter pulled from every DCC library which DSV didn't know about.

Q11. Tom Reardon, Exeter: He heard on Radio Devon a suggestion that a royal mail van carries a box of books in the back as they go to all villages.

A11. In Scotland the GPO van is a bus too and I would like to see some of that and would talk to the PO in view of this. We tried something in Sparkwell with books and it was not used so we gave up. I am not against it but we need the PO to agree to it. Postmen seem to be running all the time anyway but tell us what you want and we will get books delivered by post if you are physically unable to get to the library service.

Q12. Bill Jordan, Exmouth: Are you happy with the degree of cooperation with the services run by the DCC and NHS?

A12. The changes supposed to have a holistic approach with the police, NHS etc, not to have police in closed offices but in schools and libraries so they can be seen. I have never been happy with the health authority. My surgery opening hours are 8am to 12pm 5 days a week, no afternoons or evenings except emergencies. Don't get ill at the weekend!

Q13. BJ then asked about the closure of care homes in the county.

A13. That question is difficult to answer at the moment as some of our homes are running half full. Extra care housing is the future in my view but a consultation would have to be undertaken and I don't want to run any more consultations at the moment.

Q14. Tony Siddall, Exmouth: You have been aware of us for a long time now. What value do you put on the work we do?

A14. I put a lot of value on all voluntary organisations as it gives another view on Devon. If you think how many local organisations there are, the best we can do is go out and meet these groups of people and get feedback from them – it is very useful to get the views back.

Q15. Tony Simpson, Honiton: Is government listening?

A15. I don't think they understand rather than not listening. The major cuts we are going to bring in is in their election year and I have never known such a disjoint between MPs and local government. We are still spending as a country more than we are earning and local government has done a good job on our bit of the deficit. TS – MPs may get an 11% increase when we have more cuts! JH – they live in a different world and when they get to parliament they can lose contact with the real world.

Q16. Bob Buskin, Seaton: Having heard how many millions Exeter airport made are you sorry you sold it?

A16. No as they wrote it off as it wasn't making a profit and it didn't resell for very much. We sold for £60m when it was £12m in debt. We invested £48m in building projects in Devon and more than doubled it by match funding from other organisations. It kept Devon builders going through the lean periods of 2008-09.

Q17. Ann McClements, Culm Valley: I am sure you will agree that the dissemination of information is difficult for you and voluntary organisations. Going back to libraries – they do very well in giving

information out to us, so if they are going to be cut in anyway, it is not just about books – it's about dissemination of information, how are you going to protect this?

A17. A consultation going on at the present moment is about the mobile library service not libraries themselves. We are changing some libraries to providing more than books, we are putting in cafes, children's centres and sometimes extra rooms that can be used for extra purposes. Where they are situated they are the centres of the population but having said that less people are using them than they used to and it has to be the locals – I can take you to water but I can't make you drink it. More and more people are getting online. The same with mobile phones – 20-30 years ago we had a phone box in every village. Most of the libraries will undoubtedly stay the same as they are community hubs. We have a legal duty for one library in the county and that would be deemed to Exeter Central Library. TS said that there were legal challenges on the way the libraries have been closed. JH – yes there were in other Counties, but it is the way they were being closed not the fact they were closed.

Q18. Barbara Whiting, Crediton: What links and regular contacts do you have with the local MPs so they can take local problems to central government?

A18. I discovered very early on that I couldn't get all of the Devon MPs in the same room at the same time. What I have done is once a year I go and tell them what I am going to do with the budget, this is what and why, and I want you to walk with me. I now meet up with them twice a year, I am in touch with many of them on the phone on a frequent basis, or they call me if they have a problem. It is fair to say that when I was asked to become chairman of the SW region of Local Authorities I initially said No. I went on holiday, they had another lobby and when I got back I found that I had become Chairman which means I now have a direct link to some of the junior and middle ranking Ministers.

Q19. Jose Kimber, Tiverton: Yesterday I attended a health summit by the NEW Devon CCG on transforming community services. There were 18 people present at this consultation and it was clear we were being pushed towards the concept of closure of hospital beds and into home based services. I have a number of concerns about this as this will push more responsibility on to DCC with money following, and although they talk about joined up services you won't have this between all community services unless they are all under the control of the health service or county council.

A19. The community hospital bed issue is a totally new concept. The NHS is overspending because of a whole host of reasons. I don't have an answer to be honest but DCC will be working with them. Some spending is to be overseen by the local authority but we have no control what they spend it on. It makes me nervous as we have responsibility for their power. I have a very good cabinet member for health and well being and they may be a good person to speak with as this is a rolling stone at the present moment but we do need to get the basics sorted out.

Q20. James Bradley, Okehampton: We do have a Healthwatch representative, Hilary Ackland, on the Health and Wellbeing Board. Transforming community services and using mobile phones – the CCG were quite adamant that they wouldn't use telecare or telehelp and won't be considered by the current CCG but they make huge savings. How can you influence that they look at all the options instead of being disregarded?

A20. I am surprised as telecare is going to be the future – I will take it back to County Hall as this is a backwards movement.

Q21. Jim Corben, Teignmouth: Backing up what James is saying, would you not agree that we are in fact moving into quite a new type of environment and we are still thinking in the 20th century instead of the 21st terms. This applies to the question of consultation and I appreciate your attempts over the last 3 or 4 years to be involved in consultations with groups like ours, but you are operating on a basis of

knowledge given to you by officials as they operated in the 20th century. We need to work together more closely as this is a completely new situation with cuts and savings that are going to go on. You need to bring the voluntary services into proper consultation. Do you need to re-adapt?

A21. On the whole I do agree with that and we do have to move into the 21st century and have to work quicker and more efficiently. I do my best to consult – the government doesn't like us printing magazines like Devon Connect, but it is one way of getting the message through to 300,000 houses in the county of Devon.

Cllr Hart said that any questions he couldn't answer he would take back to his officers for the answer.