

## Town & Parish Council Conference

We have just completed this year's Town and Parish Council conferences with two interesting meetings with a significant cross section of the Town and Parish Council community in Devon. Whilst the Highway Service gave an update on the challenges we are facing, we were keen to get the delegates fully engaged with a workshop and discussion session looking at a range of issues, of interest to the Towns and Parishes, like communications, self-help and Highway Inspection Policy. Some of the conversations illustrated how, even when we think we have done a good job to get information out, it is not always received or acted upon in the way we might expect.

The discussions on the self-help scheme enabled us to demonstrate the excellent PROW and highway case studies, but also identified some Town and Parish Council concerns about the consistency of initial responses, the provision of positive support to make things happen for self-help volunteers and delays in providing the scheme documentation for community Road Wardens.

Some of the discussions on Highway Inspection Policy, where we are trying to align our approach with the emerging National Code of Practice and national best practice, revealed the gap in the understanding of some members of the public on our prioritisation of network needs and the difference between reactive interventions (fixing hazardous defects) and planned interventions (asset management plan led works programmes).

We will take stock of the feedback from the conferences and use this to inform the way we communicate, engage and develop the service. This will enable us to keep the communities we serve in mind, when we change the way we work, so that we meet their needs or, if that is not possible, so that they understand the reasons for the changes we make and the way we work.

## Digital by Design

One of the themes identified for future year budget cuts is Digital by Design. I think this is all about how we can improve efficiency by digital communications and by publishing more information so that people can self-serve when transacting with services or seeking information and updates.

A corporate overview of progress across the Council, including the highways and traffic management service, is underway. This will enable decisions to be made on the development of common platforms for doing business with the County Council, like obtaining licences or permits and on line payments.

Work on Digital by Design is being managed by the corporate "Common Solutions Board" which comprises officer representatives from across the organisation. The Board will report to Corporate Leadership team and make recommendations on where to focus our investment and support for digital solutions to help drive further efficiencies.

## Civil Parking Enforcement

The first year annual report for the Civil Parking Enforcement service will be published soon. Civil parking enforcement was previously carried out by Exeter City Council and District Councils in Devon under agency agreements for the on-street element of the work. Following a review of the service, an alternative delivery model was recommended, which would provide a more consistent,

focussed, countywide on-street service and deliver savings. Cabinet consider a number of ways of developing the new service model, one of which included continued working with the District Councils. However, it decided to bring the service in-house, with a single back office and management structure and teams of enforcement officers dispersed around the County.

The annual report measures the performance of the new service against the business case for service change. It describes how the in-house service is providing more consistent enforcement activity with a better focus on supporting effective traffic movements in urban areas at busy times and in meeting the needs of rural communities. The previous enforcement service deficit of about £795k in a year has been reduced to £60k, which exceeds the business case target and has been achieved through reductions in service costs and increased income through better enforcement processes.

This is an excellent example of business change that has been well planned and managed to deliver a better and more cost effective service.

David