County Councillor Report – August 2025

Dear Parish Councillors,

I hope you’ve all had a chance to enjoy the glorious summer so far. It’s been another full month locally, with plenty of council business, casework, and community events.

**Council Finances and SEND Pressures**
Devon County Council continues to face serious financial pressures, including a £30 million funding gap this year. Savings are having to be made, but key services are being protected and improved. It’s been a busy month in Devon, not least because of the ongoing financial pressure caused by the ballooning Special Educational Needs Disability (SEND) overspend, which has now reached around £170 million. This figure exceeds the council’s entire cash reserves and reflects a national funding system that simply doesn’t meet the real cost of supporting children with additional needs. This is a national problem that is being left at the feet of local government.

However, Devon County Council has successfully secured an extension to the ring-fencing of this deficit until March 2028, giving us critical breathing space and avoiding what would have been an immediate financial cliff edge. This is a welcome and hard-won reprieve, reflecting both determined negotiation and a shared recognition from central government that the current system is unsustainable. While challenges remain - and the cumulative debt continues to grow - I want to acknowledge the council’s leadership team for holding their nerve, protecting services, and continuing to push for long-term reform.

**Highways and Drainage**
The council’s pothole repair blitz is still underway. I’ve been continuing to report problems across the division, especially where surface water and poor drainage are making matters worse. Some repairs have been made, but many still aren’t lasting. I’ll keep pushing for better standards and long-term fixes. Please continue reporting defects online and copying me in where helpful.

I’ve also been raising concerns about the poor quality of footway slurry seal work recently carried out by the Kiely Group. After significant pressure, Devon County Council’s Asset Management engineers met with Kiely on site to inspect the works. The engineers confirmed that a number of issues need to be addressed - from overspill on kerb lines and ironworks, to sections where the slurry hasn’t been applied properly, and depressions that are holding water. They’ve instructed Kiely to return to clean, resurface, and in some places, completely redo areas where the product was laid too thinly. I’ve also raised concerns about the inadequate pre-cleaning and weed removal, which have been acknowledged and should now be tackled properly.

This is a step in the right direction, but I’ll be keeping a close eye to ensure promises are kept and standards improve. Residents shouldn’t have to settle for sub-par workmanship - especially when public money is involved.

**Parking Restrictions**
I’ve heard from a number of residents this month concerned about proposed parking restrictions in Landkey and Swinbridge. Many have raised questions about the safety implications and the lack of alternative parking. The consultation is still open until 7th August, and I would encourage everyone to respond. Once the consultation closes, the proposals will come to the Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC), where I’ll make sure local voices are heard. HATOC has the final say as to whether the proposals are agreed, amended, or rejected.

**Household Support and Cost-of-Living Help**
The Household Support Fund remains available for residents facing financial difficulties. Support includes help with food and energy costs. Although funding has been cut, the scheme is still running – please do pass on the details to anyone who might benefit.

**Supporting Our Children in Care – “Talented Me” and Corporate Parenting**
I’m proud to share that I’ve recently taken on the role of chair for the “Talented Me” subgroup of Devon’s Corporate Parenting Strategic Board. Corporate parenting is more than a duty - it’s about treating children in care and care leavers with the same love, ambition, and support we would want for our own families.

The “Talented Me” group is focused on helping young people in care thrive in education, training, and employment. That means not only supporting their current needs, but raising aspirations and removing barriers. We’re working on a number of practical initiatives - from mentoring schemes and enrichment activities, to ringfenced apprenticeships and the creation of a Talent and Aspirations Bank to connect young people with real-world opportunities.

This work matters because talent doesn’t grow in isolation. It needs stability, encouragement, and people who believe in you. We’re building that across the council and with our partners - so that every child in our care knows they are seen, valued, and backed all the way.

This year’s “Love Our Children Week” was a joyful reminder of why this matters - a week-long celebration of children in care and care leavers, culminating in the Celebration of Achievement awards at Exeter Racecourse. Over 500 young people were recognised. These aren’t token gestures. They are public declarations that our young people matter and that their futures are full of possibility. I’ll be working hard to ensure this isn’t just a policy area or a meeting agenda. It’s a shared promise that we must all help to keep.

**Chulmleigh Old Fair – More Than a Celebration**
This year’s Chulmleigh Old Fair was a highlight of the summer and, as ever, a reminder of what makes our communities special. I was proud to help organise and play a small part in a number of events across the week – from the running Craft Market and serving tea at the Sports Day, to first aid cover during the Saturday night street party. But more than just enjoying the festivities, I found myself reflecting on why traditions like this matter.

These ancient celebrations are more than just fun - they’re part of the deep social fabric that holds our rural communities together. Chulmleigh’s Royal Charter dates back to 1253. For over 770 years, people have gathered in this market town to share a drink, tell stories, mark the seasons, and feel connected. In an age of isolation and rapid change, the Old Fair reminds us that belonging doesn’t require uniformity - it flourishes in diversity, and in shared acts of kindness, inclusion, and mutual care.

At a time when ideas like “British Values” are too often reduced to political slogans or exclusionary rhetoric, I believe events like the Old Fair show what true national pride looks like: people of all ages and backgrounds working side by side to create something joyful, accessible, and welcoming. Our community is made stronger not by drawing lines around who belongs, but by celebrating how much we all contribute - whether that’s baking cakes, lending a gazebo, running the vegetable show, judging the fancy dress, serving the tea, or picking up litter at the end of the night.

We don’t need to leave national identity to the loudest and angriest voices. Pride in place, history, and tradition can be reclaimed as a progressive value - one rooted in empathy, tolerance, and the belief that everyone matters. That, to me, is what Britishness should be about.

**Care and Challenge – Community Safety and Respect**
I’ve continued working on “Care and Challenge”, a framework aimed at tackling adolescent misogyny and supporting young people to grow up in a culture of respect. My background in teaching and youth work has taught me the value of early intervention, clear expectations, and role-modelling kindness. I’m in the process of sharing this approach with colleagues and pushing for meaningful action from the council.

**Local Grants Still Available**
My County Councillor Locality Budget is open for applications. If you’re part of a local group or know of a project that could do with a small boost, please get in touch. So far, it’s helped support summer activities, community transport, and a few parish initiatives - but there’s more available.

**Ongoing Casework**
I’ve continued to take up casework across the division — including drainage, housing, school transport, and highways. As always, if there’s something I can help with or raise on your behalf, please let me know.

In the coming weeks, I’ll be:

* Monitoring road repairs and pressing for better standards.
* Scrutinising SEND improvement plans and care outcomes through committee work.
* Representing residents’ views on parking and traffic safety at HATOC.
* Supporting community groups and events where needed.
* Continuing to make the case for fairer funding and kinder services.

Thank you for all you do in your communities - and for keeping me in the loop.

All the best,

Cllr Ed Tyldesley