

May 2024 update Report – Cllr Lois Samuel for Okehampton Rural

Council Leaders submit their proposal for Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority to the Secretary of State

Devon County Council and Torbay Council have formally submitted our joint proposal for a Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (CCA) to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP.

It follows agreement by both councils for the formation of a Devon and Torbay CCA that, if agreed by the Secretary of State, would oversee a raft of new decision-making powers and funding devolved to Devon and Torbay from Whitehall.

[Find out more about how the proposal will allow local decisions to be made about local priorities, such as housing](#)

Integrated Adult Social Care update

Last week the Integrated Care Partnership met, and Cllr James McInnes was very pleased with such a productive and engaging session as we focussed on our Children and Young People priority. With such a wide range of partners and expertise from across Devon, Torbay and Plymouth, both Officers and Members, and representation from statutory and VCSE organisation, conversations were informed and informative as we all continued to learn how we can best work together to try and deliver better outcomes for people and communities.

The One Eastern Devon Local Care Partnership met at the end of last month too. It is clear that the Partnership has come along way under Cllr Ian Halls stewardship, and a culture of collaboration is at the heart of what the Partnership is trying to achieve. At the session we heard about the developing strategy for Family Hubs and the opportunities for partners to contribute to their development and delivery. We also focussed on how the Partnership can influence and encourage action on mental health.

Here are a few other things I wanted to highlight this month:

Update on activity following Cabinet decisions on the North Devon Link Service and Day Services

- Following the [Cabinet decision on the future of the North Devon Link Service](#), officers have been in touch with Link Centre staff and advised

them of the next steps, they will be supported by HR for the redeployment process. Members of the Mental Health Alliance will be visiting the centres to begin the process of supporting people to alternative support services. They will hold one-to-one conversations with people to understand their needs and their interests and to support them to access alternative support. The DCC Estates teams are linking in with the various community organisations that expressed an interest in taking space in the Link Centre buildings but had not wanted to co-locate with the current service.

- Officers will be working with the Mental Health Alliance to monitor the outcomes for the people they are supporting so a report can be brought back to the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee in 6 months to provide assurance that people have been supported to alternative services.
- Following the [Cabinet decision on the future of day services](#), conversations have been taking place with staff currently working in day services to discuss opportunities for their future roles within IASC now we are clear that the day services within the proposal will close.

Evolving the Reaching For Independence service

- Work is taking place to redesign our Reaching for Independence Services. The services is a Devon wide service. The redesign work is focused on ensuring that the team is the right shape and size, in the right place and with the right skills and tools to deliver the best possible services to people. The redesign aims to support a consistency of approach and practice across Devon, and to better support our promoting independence vision and our strengths-based approach. What this will mean is the delivery of more intensive short-term episodes of enabling, and only drawing people into on-going commissioned care when it is absolutely the right thing to do. As part of the work, we will be creating a dedicated management structure to this service and to our Inhouse day services.

CQC Inspection update

- This month more local authorities have been notified of their inclusion in the CQC Inspection process, and this time the focus has been in the South West region with Bath & North East Somerset, Wiltshire and South

Gloucestershire all notified this week. That brings the number of South West authorities that have been notified up to 4 including Gloucestershire who were notified in March.

- Assessment of Integrated Care Systems was introduced through The Health and Care Act 2022, giving the CQC new responsibilities to assess whether integrated care systems are meeting the needs of their local populations. A short delay to the start of assessments has been announced to enable the CQC to further refine its approach and to draw learning from the pilot assessments that took place in Birmingham and Solihull ICS and Dorset ICS.

Independent care providers annual fee uplift for 2024/25

- The annual process to increase provider rates has taken place and the consultation completed. The outcome for Older People will see an uplift of 4% take place for all non-staff costs, and 6% for staffing elements. This staffing element is an improved offer compared to the original proposal and recognises the significant concerns raised in the consultation about the ability to afford National Living Wage. For younger adults (up to 64) the uplift is 6%. This improved offer recognises the significant concerns raised in the consultation about the ability to afford National Living Wage, as well as the fact that fees in this market do not benchmark as high as those for the over 65s market. The uplift for Community Based Services will be 4%.

Inclusion Health Devon Community Interest Company (IncluDe): New provider from 1 September 2024

- A new community interest company called Inclusion Health Devon (IncluDe) has been awarded the contract to provide primary medical care services to the homeless and vulnerably housed in Exeter and Barnstaple following a competitive procurement process. Inclusion Health Devon has been set up by clinicians from both the Clock Tower Surgery in Exeter and Freedom Centre in Barnstaple, who have many years of experience in delivering care to inclusion health groups.
- Currently Exeter and Barnstaple primary care homeless services are two independent services provided by different providers. With the contract for the Exeter service coming to an end on 31 August 2024, it provided an opportunity to procure for both services to enable a single provider to deliver the services. On 1st September 2024, Inclusion Health Devon will be responsible

for delivering both these services. The premises for the services will continue to be in CoLab, Exeter and Freedom Centre, Barnstaple. The aim will be for both services to operate as one practice - sharing, developing, and learning from the best aspects of both services.

Special Education Needs Update :-

[Head of Mental Health Commissioning for NHS Devon talks to us about support in schools](#)

A key part of our SEND improvement plan is the work that we do in partnership with NHS Devon in schools to support children and young people with mild to moderate mental health and wellbeing concerns. We caught up with Louise Arrow, Head of Mental Health Commissioning for NHS Devon, to hear more about the early intervention support her Mental Health Support Team provide.

"We currently have seven NHS Mental Health Support Teams working in 57 primary, secondary and special schools, providing early intervention support to children and young people. That support is delivered in a variety of ways, including face to face Cognitive Behavioural Therapy sessions, workshops, as well as online support, all adapted to meet the needs of individual children and young people. The teams also work closely with school staff, helping to develop schools' own approach to providing mental health and wellbeing support to their pupils.

"In the last academic year, we've helped 1,841 young people through one-to-one sessions and held over 300 workshops, attended by more than 6,000 young people. We also held nearly 40 workshops attended by more than 200 parents and carers; and around 560 staff workshop or training sessions, attended by more than 5,000 education staff. That level of mental health support to young people and schools is set to increase this year thanks to additional funding from NHS England for two more Mental Health Support Teams, with more to follow in September 2025.

"Schools have told us that the support they receive from us is helping them deliver better care for their pupils. This was reflected in a recent national survey, where Devon Mental Health Support Teams, and the support we provided, was rated amongst the highest in the country. Children and their families have also been positive about the difference our teams make."

Changing how we work with providers

Our refreshed SEND Transformation Programme is well underway now, and we are working hard to make the necessary changes to improve the lived experience of children and young people, whilst ensuring that we also reach a financially sustainable position.

Our focus is transformational change not just service improvement, and a large part of this is altering how we support children and young people so that they are able stay within their mainstream setting, as well as increasing the number of places available at specialist providers within the public sector.

However, we recognise that for some children, placements with providers in the independent sector will still be the most appropriate based on their needs. Where this is the case, we need to ensure that a high quality of education is provided and that we also achieve best value for the placement. For this to happen, we need to make some changes to things like our commissioning and procurement arrangements for independent special school places, alternative provision and short stay support to ensure a consistent approach and successful outcomes for children and young people.

We've contacted providers to discuss the way we currently work and some of the changes we are planning to make and have invited them to share their thoughts with us and their experience of working in other ways, for example with other local authorities

Calls to the SEND Statutory Team transferring to our Customer Service Centre

We're making changes across our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Statutory Team that we hope will improve the timeliness of the Education Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) and plans.

Our Customer Service Centre is using a new system that brings all communication together in one place and is integrated with the SEND Statutory teams so they can help respond to calls, assist with information and pass messages quickly to the right people. This means that the team can focus more of their time on completing assessments, drafting EHCNA's and progressing plans once they are issued, rather than answering calls.

There will be no change to phone line numbers, and the service to families and professionals will continue uninterrupted, but with the extra flexibility of

extended opening hours which will now be from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. We will be monitoring how this new approach is working, to make sure it's having a positive impact.

New Interim Head of SEND Statutory Team

As part of the improvements that we want to make to our statutory processes and our communication with parent carers, we have also appointed a new interim Head of the service. From the beginning of May, Samantha Chapman, (Sam), will take over as manager of the team. The role was previously held by Julia Foster who left the organisation at the end of March.

Sam is a highly valued senior manager within our SEND transformation programme. With her in this post, and the changes that we are making to improve the efficiency of the team, we are confident that our SEND Statutory Team can drive forward the improvements that we and families across Devon need.

We ask that families to continue to contact the service in the same way, by telephoning [01392 380434](tel:01392380434). Further information about the team is [available on our website](#).

Family Hubs are being developed across Devon

Families will be aware that we are developing a network of Family Hubs and associated outreach services across Devon, and that Action for Children are helping us prepare for the changes. You can see the range of services that we envisage being part of our Family Hubs network [on our website](#). They build on the services that have been provided through Children's Centres for many years. But there are big differences:

- Family Hubs will provide help and support to families of children aged from zero to 19 years old, or up to 25 years old for young people with special educational needs or disabilities, and young people with care experience
- the support available from Family Hubs will be accessible to all families with children in that age range. There will be no assessment or eligibility criteria, and no need to be referred by a professional
- Family Hubs will work more closely with existing care and support providers in local communities, so there will be a wider range of help and advice available to families

From this month, families will begin to see a gradual change as Family Hubs and the services they deliver will start to become more present in local communities. The next step will be to decide where the support can be accessed, but for now we are asking families to ring ahead or email Action for Children to speak to a member of staff for advice and support. We've published a special edition newsletter about Family Hubs, and how families can access them.

[Our new aids have helped to improve the lives of children with a visual impairment](#)

Children with a visual impairment in Devon have helped us to design a new custom-made armband and lanyard to help others more easily recognise that they have a disability. They've been a big hit with young people who have told us that these aids have had an immediate impact and made a big difference to their day-to-day lives.

More than 600 children and young people in Devon live with a visual impairment which affects their learning, development, independence, inclusion, and their confidence. But, because it's a disability that isn't visible to others, this can inadvertently lead to children and young people not being treated with the care and consideration that they deserve and are entitled to.

Usually those who are visually impaired use an awareness aid, such as the internationally recognised white short 'symbol cane' or white 'long cane'. But these aids are designed with adults in mind, and children told us that they needed something to suit their age group. So our Rehabilitation Officer for Visually Impaired Children (ROVIC) service set out, with help from young people, to design two new visual awareness aids that they felt 'comfortable and confident' using. [Read the full story on the news page of our website.](#)

[Autism and Us programme returns for the summer term](#)

Our popular Autism and Us programme gets underway for the summer term soon, offering support for families of children and young people who have an autism diagnosis, or who are waiting for one.

The free programme is made up of four weekly 'live online' sessions (each approximately two hours long) providing an overview of autism, communications needs, understanding and supporting behaviour and sensory needs. There's also more in-depth one-off workshops on specific topics such as vulnerability and online safety, managing stress and anxiety and verbal communication support strategies.

[Please visit our website](#) for full details of the programme and workshops, including how to book

Fostering South West – new recruitment hub

A new regional fostering recruitment support hub for the south west went live last Monday, 29 April. Fostering South West covers all local authorities in the south west.

The regional support hub will be a centrally run 'front door' across our regional local authority cluster and will act as the first point of contact for prospective carers making an enquiry. The aim is to increase the conversion rate between initial enquiry and application.

Once processed through the hub, each local authority will pick up the enquiries and ensure the prospective foster carers have the information and support they need.

South West Fostering will provide increased levels of support and share resources for the benefit of children and fostering families.

Our Devon County Council fostering team has been working alongside the hub team on the changes and how this will be rolled out in our own local authority. We have good numbers of people interested in fostering contacting us in Devon. However, we always need more and this new approach with a regional hub will build on and enhance the good work already rolled out.

Emily Hextall, Head of Service for Fostering Devon, said:

"This is an exciting opportunity for Fostering Devon to be involved in a positive development in the world of fostering. The hub will support the development of relationships between local authorities to improve the experiences of foster carers in the south west and provide additional support to those embarking on their fostering journey."

The Government has funded this approach for an initial 12-month period, and updates will be shared over the next year. If you have any questions please contact Emma Nobes, Service Manager for Fostering.

Best wishes

Lois Samuel