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## New grants available for community groups; Proposal to invest an extra £10 million in Devon's roads; Work to improve timeliness of EHCNAs; Long-serving Leader steps down; and Let's Talks Teenagers

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### **Does your scheme benefit the community? Grants are available**

Grants are available to local community groups that run projects that help improve people's wellbeing, reduce hardship, provide a warm safe space to work or learn or socialise.

Groups with schemes that bring communities together, alleviate food poverty or tackle loneliness, isolation, and build self-esteem, for example, are invited to apply.

They could include offering advice, peer support or guidance on budgeting, cooking low-cost nutritional meals, or supporting the recruitment, training and retention of volunteers.

Organisers of projects that have a clear and direct community benefit, such as improving the environment, or that use innovation to improve efficiency or proposals that seek to expand the reach of an existing scheme are also encouraged to apply.

This is the third year that we've made funding like this available to support local schemes, through the Growing Communities Fund. Since 2022, we've made more than £1.1 million available to help communities build self-reliance and resilience.

You can [read more in the news story on our website](#).



### **Proposal to invest an extra £10 million in Devon's roads**

We're planning to inject an extra £10 million into repairing the county's roads this year.

The proposal is due to go before our Cabinet on Wednesday 8 May in response to recent budget discussions for additional investment in highways, including drainage.

We received a better than expected settlement from the Government last month to help tackle our overspend on education for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

We're now in a position to make extra money available for road repairs and drainage and will be looking to invest another £10 million into the highway maintenance budget.

A spokesperson said: "Throughout the budget setting process it was recognised we needed to invest more in roads and we're now in a position to potentially invest an extra £10 million in our highway network. The extremely wet weather over the past year has inflicted a huge amount of damage on our roads so this proposed funding is very much needed and will help prevent further decline in its condition."

You can [read more in the story on our news page.](#)



*The proposal will allow local decisions to be made about local priorities, such as jobs and skills*

## Leaders thank everyone who responded to devolution consultation

Leaders of Devon and Torbay Councils are thanking everyone who responded to the recent consultation about the proposed devolution deal for the Devon and Torbay area.

The proposed deal will transfer significant decision-making powers and funding from Whitehall to Devon and Torbay, so that important decisions on local priorities, such as jobs and skills, housing, and the environment, can be made locally.

But first, Devon County Councillors and Torbay Councillors must meet to consider the consultation analysis and to agree next steps.

Nearly 900 responses to the consultation were received from individuals and a broad cross-section of organisations, including Devon's District councils, Town and Parish councils, and representatives from the business, education and skills, housing, transportation, health service providers and voluntary sectors.

In addition to online consultation, 31 roundtable meetings were held across Devon and Torbay, attended by more than 700 people.

Our Cabinet meets on Monday 22 April, and Torbay Council's Cabinet meets on Thursday 25 April to consider the consultation analysis and to discuss the next steps.

You can [read more in the news story on our website.](#)





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

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

We've heard from parents and professionals about their experiences of contacting the SEND Statutory Team and reviewed our processes to identify things that we could improve.

We know that phone calls into the service were taking a long time to be answered, and for people to receive a response.

We also know that answering the calls was taking up a lot of time for the SEND Statutory Team, time they could otherwise use to focus on their casework and progress Educational Health and Care Needs Assessments and plans.

So, from this week, calls that have been going to the SEND Statutory Team are being re-directed to our Customer Service Centre, who will be able to assist with information and pass messages quickly to the right people.

There's no change to the phone line numbers, so 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.

You can [read more about the improvements in the story on our news page.](#)



## **Long-serving leader steps down**

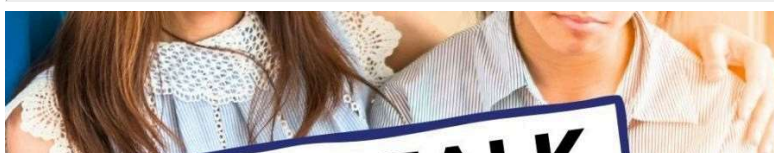
Our Leader of Devon County Council, Councillor John Hart, announced this week his intention to stand down from his post as Leader, after 15 years.

"It is the right time for me to stand down as leader. The County Council is in a good position with a balanced budget," he said.

John became Leader of Devon's opposition Conservative Party in 2007 and won power of the County Council in the 2009 election. He has remained Leader since then.

The Devon Conservative Group will hold a ballot to decide the County Council's next Leader and John will remain in post until then.

You can [read more in the story on our news page.](#)







## Do you care for a neurodivergent young person? The Let's Talk team would like to hear from you!

A new series of the highly successful 'Let's Talk' webinars for parents is being developed.

The Let's Talk Team is working on sessions designed for parents and carers of neurodivergent young people and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

They are keen to make sure that the programme is suitable and accessible, so if you care for or support a neurodivergent young person or a young person with special educational needs and disabilities, please take a few moments to respond to our survey by Friday 26 April 2024.

Let's Talk is a free, open access online programme provides a space for parents and carers to discuss the challenges facing young people today and understand the tools and techniques that they can use to support them.

So far the sessions have focussed on teenagers and pre-teens, covering topics such as drugs and alcohol, body image, online safety and peer pressure.

**Please share your thoughts with the team using this quick online survey**



## Guidance given to home-based online pet food suppliers

Home-based online pet food suppliers are being reminded of the importance of ensuring that the products that they sell are legal after ten were found to be selling products that were not legally compliant with product labelling requirements.

Our Trading Standards Service carried out test purchases across Somerset and Devon (including Plymouth and Torbay).

The businesses were selling their products through social media platforms and marketplaces and on their own websites.

All 10 businesses failed strict labelling requirements. Officers tested dog treats and canine supplements and in each case the product was incorrectly labelled.

The suppliers have been given guidance on how to ensure that the products that they sell are within the law.

Naomi Osborne, the service's lead officer for Agriculture, said:

"Many of these businesses set up during or after the pandemic, and we were concerned that there was a lack of awareness of the requirements and legal obligations relevant to this type of operation."

You can [read more about the test purchases in the news story on our website.](#)



## Prepare to repair – the BIG FIX returns next month

Running throughout the whole of May, The BIG FIX has one aim – to fix and breathe new life into as many broken things as possible.

The event, coordinated by us, sees skilled menders fix broken items such as electrical equipment, garden equipment, clothing, jewellery, clocks and much more to give them a new lease of life.

Due to its huge success, The BIG FIX event is now nationwide across the country for the fourth time, with 60 Repair Cafés already registered to take part.

The BIG FIX hopes to help people save money, not only by repairing old items but also passing on skills to fix their own items in the future.

Repair Cafés are increasing in popularity as people are becoming more budget and environmentally conscious. They are organised and run by volunteers who offer their time and skills to help mend broken items and keep them in use for longer. Volunteers also help greet visitors, supply tea and coffee and restock supplies of cakes and other tasty treats.

[Read more in the story on our news page.](#)



## NHS booking system opens for spring COVID-19 vaccinations

The NHS National Booking System opened this week for spring COVID-19 vaccination bookings.

Around 884,000 people in the South West region will be eligible for a spring COVID-19 vaccination, including people aged 75 or over, those with a weakened immune system and older adult care home residents.

Spring vaccinations will be available until 30 June 2024.

COVID-19 can still be very dangerous and even life-threatening, particularly for older people and those with a weakened immune system. The vaccine gives good protection and helps reduce the risk of serious illness or death, needing to go to hospital, catching and spreading the virus, and protects against different variants.

Anyone eligible for the COVID-19 vaccination can book an appointment through the [NHS website](#) or by calling 119 for free, with parents or carers able to book a COVID-19 vaccination for children under 16 on their behalf. Eligible people aged 16 and over can also use the NHS app to book an appointment.

The NHS is sending texts, emails, NHS app messages or letters to those who are eligible, but they do not have to wait for the invite to book.

[Read more about the vaccination programme on the NHS Devon website.](#)



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