

District Council Annual Report: 2023 - 2024

Cllr Christopher Oram - Bickleigh & Cornwood Ward

With a new Liberal Democrat administration at Council, we decided that we would introduce an inclusive council where our opposition councillors have had the opportunity to take leading roles in the council. Chairs, vice chairs and in a couple of cases, on the Executive itself. Some thought this may cause problems but instead it has been a resounding success.

We were clear from the outset we needed to get the bread-and-butter issues of waste collection, planning and enforcement. We have now rolled out the Devon Aligned Scheme (DAS) for household waste collection across the whole district. We know it won't be perfect but compared to the previous outsourced attempts, it has gone very well. Planning is improving but we need to do better with enforcement.

Over the course of the last year, South Hams District Council have been busy. Some of our most important areas are: the Energy Bills Support Scheme, began the Corporate Strategy (later called the council Plan) consultation, 'My Place, My Views' survey, a new SHDC website, funding £40,000 to support the work of Sustainable South Hams, Active Travel Survey, Council Tax Discount Scheme for Care Leavers, Council Tax Reduction Consultation, consulting on the Devon Devolution Deal, opening of St Ann's Chapel, new staff and IT systems to assist Planning, consulting on the Joint Local Plan, working with South Dartmoor Community Energy, introducing the voluntary downsizing scheme, introducing new Climate Change and Biodiversity Locality Fund, introducing a South Hams Housing Offer to provide practical and financial help so that communities can deliver much needed homes in their local area, a Public Space Protection Order consultation, the reintroduction South Hams Community Awards, supporting 'Love Food Hate Waste's' *Food Waste Action Week* campaign, supported South Dartmoor Community Energy to help residents reduce their bills, plans to create a district-wide arts festival for the South Hams next summer, Household Support Fund and being involved in the Plymouth & South Devon Freeport Consultation.

We have formally adopted our Council Plan for 2024 - 2028 with four top priorities we want to focus on.

We want to support climate change and biodiversity, tackle the challenging housing situation, strengthen the economy, and enhance our services for residents.

Some of the projects we will be working on include more electric vehicle charging, more affordable and temporary homes, help with independent living support, improving energy efficiency, better public and leisure facilities and more planting of trees.

For me personally, my first year as a District Councillor has been full of ups and downs. I have attended nearly every committee meeting at district council, even the ones I wasn't a member of. I have strived to commit to training both at council and training provided by my party so I can try to deliver the representation you all deserve. I have done my best to hold to account the Devon County Council, my own executive/leader at District Council and, in

one or two cases, parish councils to link together the different levels of local politics. I have been steadfast in local planning to ensure regulations are upheld for the benefit of communities. I have enjoyed meeting people across the ward, attending lots of community events, fundraising events, meeting residents in their homes to discuss the issues that mean the most to them, meeting business owners, community leaders and many more.

However, I have also reflected on areas I need to improve. I will need to do more to ensure that I can attend more, if not all, of the Parish Council meetings in all four parishes in our ward. I will continue to attend training about planning and have even asked to be on the Planning Committee from June 2024 so I can be better equipped to help residents with their planning queries. Before being elected to SHDC I didn't have much faith in the use of social media, however I have been persuaded that social media can be a great way to share information across the ward. Therefore, I will be doing more on Facebook in the next few years but that only works if residents are willing to follow me on these platforms. Please see my contact details below.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank residents for their support and their understanding as I have taken to my new role as your councillor, and I look forward to the next year of helping residents in the ward and representing you at the district council and beyond.

Cllr Chris Oram