

This news round up is being sent to all Town and Parish Councils. You may wish to include these highlighted topics in your parish magazines. For more detailed information, you can go straight to the Council web site for agendas, reports and minutes by following this link – http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/index/your_council/committee_minutes_and_agendas.htm

Council news round-up for January/February 2008

Celebration of Parishes and Towns – January 2008 (Democratic Services 01395 517546)

This event was run to enable our parish and town councils to celebrate local achievements. Thank you to all Councils who took part. The quality of the submissions was fantastic. The pride of Councils in their communities and how well partnerships were working was an inspiration as was the way delegates were so ready to share what they had learned and how they had gone about things. Everyone took away ideas, contact numbers, shared learning and enthusiasm from the evening.

2008 awards:

Best Achievement in the last five years:

Uplyme Parish Council – Children's Play Area
Exmouth Town Council – Festival of Arts

Most innovative plans in the pipeline:

Lympstone Parish Council – Youth Club
Honiton Town Council - Restoration of The Glen

Special Award for Achievement:

Beer Parish Council - Affordable Housing

We try to make sure that the parish and town council meetings here at Knowle are informative, topical and helpful. They are set up to improve communications between our Councils and we should all benefit from them. Local Councils have been asked to come forward with suggestions for future meetings.

Nationwide free bus travel scheme (Enquiries to buspass@eastdevon.gov.uk or phone 01395 571500)

This scheme is being introduced on 1 April this year. It extends the current local scheme. So if you are aged 60 or over or eligible disabled, you will be able to travel for free on any off-peak local bus anywhere in England. The concession won't allow free use of national coaches but will allow travellers, eligible under the scheme, to travel further a field on local buses. Leaflets and bus pass application forms will be available in Tourist Information Centres throughout the district and the Council is looking to local parish and town councils to help publicise the scheme. Local pass holders need do nothing – as a new pass covering the extended scheme will be sent automatically.

Local Government Re-organisation in Devon (Mark Williams, Chief Executive) 01395 517408)

Authorities within Devon are continuing to debate the proposed re-organisation within Devon. This Council's preferred option is to maintain the status quo with enhanced working and shared services. The Council has set up a Working Group to discuss options and is carrying out preliminary work with the other Devon Councils. The Council is looking at all options and will include consultation with local people. The Boundary Committee for England's terms of reference have now been sent to all parishes and district councils. The Council has been summoned to a meeting with the Boundary Committee on 3 March 2008 to receive an initial briefing concerning how it proposes to carry out its work in Devon. The Chief Executive will write again to all Parish and Town Councils after that meeting with an update of what this Council proposes to do.

Public Speaking at Committees & Council meetings (Democratic Services 01395 517546)

The Council is looking at ways of introducing public speaking at its meetings. An arrangement is currently in place which allows the public to speak at the Council's planning inspection meetings, subject to notice, and this arrangement has been so well received that the Council is supportive of extending it to other meetings to encourage public interest and involvement in local democracy.

Council Tax (Diccon Pearse, Corporate Director 01395 517430)

On 20 February, the Council agreed the level of 2008/09 Council Tax. It represents an increase on last year of 4.49%. The schedule showing total cost from all precepting authorities by parish is being printed in local papers and can be viewed on our web site and at Information Points.

The Council had been obliged to work within a very tight budget to meet the rise in inflation and its commitments. Achieving a balanced budget with a rise below the Government capping level has been achieved through rigorous reviews and detailed examination of all service plans. The Council is acutely aware of the impact of expenditure on the Council Tax Payer. The work on the budgets was carried out throughout the year with the involvement of all Councillors in the prioritisation process. Affordable housing remains a top Council priority. Recycling is also a key priority.

Quality Parish/Town Councils – involvement in determining planning applications (Kate Little, Head of Planning and Countryside, 01395 517535)

East Devon District Council has given Quality Parishes the opportunity to determine planning applications for Trees and Advertisements on a 12 month trial basis. The existing Quality Parishes will be given training and support to carry out this new function. Other Councils are looking to achieve Quality status and when they do, these new trial powers will be extended to them as well.

New Tenant Handbook (Housing Projects Officer 01395 519982 or view on line http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/tenant_handbook.pdf)

The Council's Housing Service has produced a new Tenant Handbook to be given to secure tenants of Council accommodation when they move into a new council property. It covers a range of issues included paying rent, repairs and other helpful information.

Mobile Play Workers appointed (Jane Sharp and Polly Mercer 01395 571556)

The Council has appointed 2 Mobile Play Workers (using some of its grant from the Big Lottery Children's Play Programme Fund) to help set up and equip fun activities for 7 – 15 year olds in 10 rural areas throughout East Devon. Would you be interested in getting involved? Volunteers from the community are invited to come forward for free training to assist with this exciting project.

Building Control – Charter Mark

East Devon District Council's Building Control Service has been awarded the prestigious and coveted Charter Mark award. This national award recognises excellence in customer service. Building Regulations approval is required for the majority of construction work and the service helps to maintain a safe and healthy environment in which to live and work by ensuring compliance with building regulations. Awarded by the Cabinet Office, Charter Mark is designed to help public sector organisations focus on and improve customer service. The award demonstrates a commitment to excellent service, flexibility, choice and value for money.

Action to tackle the problem of dog mess

The Council continues to address the problem of dog mess on the streets. In addition to enforcing legislation and giving fixed penalties to offending dog-owners, EDDC is also rewarding people who are 'Caught Doing Right!' The Council wants to encourage people to continue to pick up dog mess and so is offering them a chance of a reward. Anyone seen picking up after their dog will be handed a Freepost card which entitles them to enter a prize draw. In addition, members of the public are being encouraged to report in confidence anyone they know who does not. Anyone wishing to report dog fouling issues should call EDDC on 01395 517457 or e mail environmentalhealth@eastdevon.gov.uk

If the Council can help, please call us.