

County Councillor Report –August/September 2026

Dear Parish Councillors,

August has been an intense month. Alongside the usual highways, drainage, school transport and individual casework, several major issues have required urgent attention across North Devon and Devon as a whole. I have tried to combine practical intervention where immediate action was possible with firm scrutiny where residents deserve clearer answers and long-term solutions.

South West Water and sewage discharges

I have continued to challenge South West Water over the scale of storm-overflow activity being reported across the region, including during very dry weeks. Data supplied by South West Water showed that across Devon and Cornwall there were 435 reported spill events in the first week of August, affecting 102 sites and totalling 108 hours, despite only 3.5 mm of rain. The following week brought less than 0.1 mm of rain, yet 353 reported activations totalled 206 hours. Between 17th and 23rd August, the reported figure rose again to 664 events across 184 sites and 299 hours, with 16.5 mm of rain. Finally, over the past week we've had roughly 4x the normal rainfall for an August week, but nearly 6x the previous week's sewage discharge.

Closer to home, the figures included repeated reports at treatment works serving our communities and discharges affecting the Little Dart and River Mole catchments. I'm particularly worried about how quickly after the first drops of rain in months we started seeing storm "storm overflow" activation and discharge events. Our rivers support wildlife, farming, and recreation. They are part of the identity of our towns and villages. Residents should not have to wonder whether a river is safe after ordinary summer rainfall, or even during an exceptionally dry week.

South West Water has told me that near-real-time Event Duration Monitor data can contain false readings and is validated later. That explanation creates a serious problem of trust. If the monitors are wrong, the monitoring system must be fixed. If the discharges are real, the sewerage network must be fixed. Publishing extraordinary figures and then relying on later validation is not an adequate response to understandable public concern.

I have kept asking for site-specific explanations, investment in ageing infrastructure and transparent reporting. The issue has now received wider press attention in both local and national newspapers. South West Water says storm-overflow activations are not determined by rainfall alone, that it is investing record amounts and that it is reviewing the locations I raised. I will continue to press for the outcome of those investigations rather than accept a generic response.

My position remains the same: stop treating storm overflows as routine, repair the leaks and networks, and put investment in infrastructure ahead of dividends and bonuses.

Barnstaple traffic disruption

The second phase of gas-main replacement works began in Barnstaple on 24th August and the initial traffic arrangement caused severe gridlock. The one-way restriction on Sticklepath Hill contributed to congestion spreading across the town, with buses delayed and reports that some patients could not reach GP appointments.

I joined fellow county councillors, the local MP, Devon County Council officers and Wales & West Utilities at an urgent review on 25th August. The immediate decision was to reverse the one-way system so traffic could travel out of Barnstaple along Sticklepath Hill and Bickington Road towards Cedars Roundabout. The aim was to prevent queues backing into the town centre, improve access to Sticklepath and reduce delays to buses.

The Old Torrington Road bus gate was not opened because that route needs to remain available for emergency access. Access for the school and nearby residential roads was also discussed. This episode showed why traffic-management plans for major utility works need robust scenario testing, clear public information and the ability to change quickly when the real-world impact is worse than forecast. I will continue to ask for lessons to be captured before future phases of work.

The one-way reversal helped open up traffic in Barnstaple Town centre and freed up the hospital and train station, however it shifted the issue into Sticklepath and Roundswell. Our residents saw standstill traffic for most of the 26th so DCC put plans in place to introduce temporary traffic lights to help traffic leave the area and join the A39 – which was flowing well. Unhelpfully, Wales & West seemingly became overwhelmed by the volume of complaints they were receiving and left the site that afternoon. They have said they will return to complete the essential gas works in the near future. This is infuriating as DCC had very nearly cracked the traffic issue and we were possibly past the worst of it – driver confusion will always subside as people get used to the works.

I hope they plan their return more carefully.

North Devon District Hospital maternity services

Birth services at North Devon District Hospital were temporarily suspended from 11th August because the Trust said it could not guarantee sufficient consultant and registrar cover to operate a safe 24-hour obstetric service. Antenatal care, community midwifery and outpatient services continue locally, but births are currently taking place mainly in

Exeter. So far there have been 60 babies born in Exeter that should have been born in North Devon – thankfully there have been no incidents reported. This is a deeply concerning situation for families across rural and coastal North Devon, I am particularly concerned about the number of mothers who may have been forced into interventions they didn't want as part of this move. The number of emergency c-sections seems unusually high to me.

At the special Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee on 17th August, members examined the reasons for the suspension, the support for affected families and the plan for reopening. The Trust reported that more than 300 pregnant women had been contacted in advance and that additional financial and logistical support had been arranged for those identified as vulnerable. North Devon District Hospital normally supports about 1,100 births each year, or roughly 3 a day.

The Trust's public update on 25th August said recruitment was progressing and that it was cautiously optimistic birth services could reopen by the end of September, subject to final recruitment and safety assurances. It also reported that a new newborn outpatient clinic had opened in North Devon for services including jaundice checks and infant-feeding support.

Safety must be paramount, but "temporary" must genuinely mean temporary. North Devon needs a clear, credible and resilient staffing plan, support that works for families facing long journeys, and transparent updates against the conditions required for reopening. I will continue to support scrutiny of the recovery plan and oppose any permanent loss of local birth services by default or drift.

Our MP, Ian Roome – is leading a campaign on the maternity services and is speaking to the trust most days. I'm proud to work alongside such a dedicated public servant.

Local Government Reorganisation scrutiny

On 16th July the Government confirmed, subject to Parliamentary approval, that Devon, Plymouth and Torbay will move to four unitary councils: Greater Plymouth Council, Exeter Council, Torbay and South Devon Council, and Devon Council. The new councils are intended to take effect on 1st April 2028, with shadow authority elections planned for May 2027. I've written an awful lot of words about this process to date!

The existing 11 councils have committed to keeping this site up to date with LGR information:

[Local Government Reorganisation in Devon - Future Devon](#)

I chaired the first meeting of Devon County Council's dedicated Local Government Reorganisation Scrutiny Committee on 30th July. The committee examined the Government's decision, the proposed transition arrangements, governance, funding

and the risks to service continuity. Devon County Council remains responsible for statutory services until the new authorities are established, so the central test must be whether the transition is safe, legal, financially controlled and focused on residents.

Since my last report, interim warding arrangements have been published and we now know that Chulmleigh & Landkey Division will no longer exist.

The parishes of Atherington, Burrington, Chittlehamholt (including Satterleigh and Warkleigh), Chittlehampton (including Umberleigh, Cobbaton, and Stowford), Chulmleigh, and Kings Nympton will be staying together and will be joined by Filleigh and Romansleigh Parish Councils to form the new “Chittlehampton & Chulmleigh Ward” with one Unitary Councillor.

The parishes of Bishop’s Tawton, Landkey and Swimbridge will form the new Landkey & Taw Valley Ward” with one Unitary Councillor.

Tawstock Parish will be split into Tawstock Urban and Tawstock Rural. The urban part of the parish will form part of the new “Roundswell Ward” and have one Unitary Councillor, whilst the rural part of the parish will be joining the parishes of Westleigh, Instow, Fremington, Horwood, Lovacott, Newton Tracey, and Yelland – to form the new “Fremington & Taw Estuary Ward” with two Unitary Councillors.

As I live in Chulmleigh, I intend to stand for election to the new Devon Council Unitary Authority in the Chittlehampton & Chulmleigh Ward in the shadow elections next May. It brings me great sadness that I won’t have the chance to represent all of your parishes again after Devon County Council dissolves in 2028. However, over the next 20 months I will continue to represent all of our parishes unwaveringly.

Highways and the Road Warden Scheme

I have been out and about with my volunteer road wardens filling in potholes this month. We’ve had a slow start as we’re still learning how best to use the cold-lay material, but it’s going very well. Please keep reporting potholes and defects to DCC in the normal way, then escalate them to me if you don’t get a satisfactory response.

I continue to chase progress on the three significant landslips affecting the A377. The Wolf Meadows scheme is expected to begin in September and take approximately three months. This is a substantial piece of engineering work and there will inevitably be some disruption while it is undertaken.

The situation at Taw Valley Garage remains more complicated because responsibility rests with the landowner and legal processes are involved. However, I have been informed that DCC are going to start work in advance of the court case being settled and are imminently seeking access to the land to begin.

At Umberleigh, design work is continuing on what is likely to be a multi-million-pound permanent solution. I know how frustrating the length of time involved in these schemes has been, particularly for communities that depend heavily on the A377, and I will continue pressing for progress and clear communication.

Looking ahead

In September I will continue pressing South West Water for site-specific answers, monitoring the maternity-service recovery plan, and developing the Local Government Reorganisation Scrutiny Committee's work programme. I will also continue with parish-level casework across the division.

Thank you, as always, to parish councillors and clerks for raising issues early and for sharing local knowledge. Please feel free to circulate this report and contact me about matters where County Council involvement may help.

All the best,

Cllr Ed Tyldesley

Devon County Councillor for Chulmleigh and Landkey