

Liberal Democrat Manifesto



South Hams District Council – 2023

The South Hams is a unique and glorious place to live in. It has a landscape second to none and vibrant towns and local communities that make it very special.

However, dig below the surface and there are many very worrying underlying trends and sources of concern. The serious lack of affordable housing and soaring rents are causing real hardship as well as damaging the local economy. We have an ageing population with all the care and support needs that implies. There are pockets of real deprivation as well as issues of rural isolation and loneliness. Our local infrastructure is inadequate and not serving the needs of communities or the local economy. The effects of climate change and biodiversity loss are already knocking at our door.

We need to deal with these fundamental issues effectively and urgently and work towards a realisable vision of the South Hams as a place with the best environment for people and for nature and which is resilient in the face of an increasingly uncertain future.

To deliver this vision we have developed ambitious and challenging policies that are presented in this manifesto as six major policy areas. These policy areas are not independent but are designed to form part of a coherent programme and each policy will contribute to our climate change and biodiversity loss agenda, and to the building of sustainable, resilient communities across the South Hams.

If the good people of South Hams give us control of the Council, we will immediately start the work of delivering the policies in this Manifesto over the next four years.

At the heart of this manifesto is the need to work in partnership with communities and to involve them in all aspects of the work of the Council and the journey ahead.

Note: To avoid clutter, many policies have a bookmark link to further details in the imaginatively named 'Further Policy Details' section of this document.

Click on the ► symbol to view the details, then use the back button to return.

Housing

The provision of affordable and social housing will be a priority. We need to provide homes for our key workers, and for the many other residents that are struggling to find affordable places to live. This applies to all ages but especially the young and the elderly. We need these homes to allow our communities to thrive. We will resist the building of any more market-value homes except where the need is properly established and there is community support.

- 1** Set up a company to enable the Council to build houses without delay. ▶
- 2** Review all existing capital projects to ensure the construction of council owned and housing association houses is a key part of capital spending.
- 3** Review all land owned by the Council and assess its suitability for affordable council owned housing. ▶
- 4** Invest in suitable property in our towns and villages to provide affordable and social rented accommodation. ▶
- 5** Give priority to truly affordable and social rented housing by mandating these as a high proportion of all new developments.
- 6** Ensure a diverse mix of high quality accommodation of different types and tenures, so that everyone can find a suitable home.
- 7** Support the delivery of specialist accommodation, including for older residents, in a way that enables people to remain within their existing communities
- 8** Work to ensure that all new developments are carbon neutral as far as is truly possible, including the build, their use as homes, and the infrastructure that serves them.
- 9** All new developments to be connected to the nearest town or village centre by segregated cycle routes and/or other means of carbon efficient transport.
- 10** All new homes built should be primary residence only. ▶
- 11** Charge all holiday and second homes double council tax.
- 12** Employ innovative methods to deliver affordable and social housing. ▶

Environment

Climate change and the degradation of our planet are the world's greatest challenge. Time is rapidly running out and we all must play our part. As a Local Authority we must provide the crucial leadership and resources necessary so that together with partners across the district we can effect the changes needed and build on the opportunities that greening our local economy presents.

- 1** Commit to investing £0.5M per year to address the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. ▶
- 2** Set up a Climate Change Working Group within the Council that will include representatives from community groups and organisations from across the district to help coordinate projects, allocate resources and to harness their expertise and energy.
- 3** Review the Council's Climate Change action plan and develop an integrated plan with partners to reduce emissions and develop a low emissions green economy. ▶
- 4** Develop a network of Electric Bicycle hubs across the District
- 5** Add electric car charging points in car parks.
- 6** Add Photo Voltaic (PV) over all our car-parks. ▶
- 7** Introduce incentives to decrease waste generation and encourage reuse of containers and other materials. Work with communities to establish local composting schemes.
- 8** Support and encourage Local Nature Reserves. ▶
- 9** Improve local bus services. Work with partners to develop integrated schemes that provide affordable, reliable and efficient transport for rural areas.
- 10** Develop an integrated plan to encourage consumption of local produce and to significantly reduce food miles in the South Hams.
- 11** Work closely with our farming community to increase the availability of local produce, to encourage a regenerative approach, to support farm shop initiatives and to help our farmers become an important anchor in a local green economy.
- 12** Introduce an incentivised rating scheme of environmental sustainability for our tourism industry.
- 13** Support and encourage community energy production. ▶
- 14** Protect our wildlife by working with partners and parishes across the district to create a network of wildlife-corridors, and where necessary provide the means for wildlife to overcome man-made barriers, such as busy roads.
- 15** Work with partners to encourage tree planting across the district in both rural and urban settings.

- 16** Work with businesses to reduce plastics pollution. ►
- 17** Work with DCC, partners and the public to reduce light pollution, which is disruptive to nocturnal animals and intrudes on our ability to enjoy the night sky. With partners, establish Dark Sky sites across the district.
- 18** Discourage the use of glyphosate herbicide by providing a service to Town and Parish Councils using alternative environmentally friendly technologies. Review possible use of Foamstream, unit cost ~£20k.

Planning & Enforcement

Over recent years the planning and enforcement function of the Council has left a lot to be desired. Applicants have experienced unacceptable delays and enforcement issues not being progressed in a timely manner. It is clear these services need more resources.

At the same time our Joint Local Plan (JLP) will be reviewed during 2024. This is a great opportunity to improve our delivery of affordable and environmentally sustainable housing. It will also allow us to lay down our strategic approach to economic development in the South Hams. We will not hesitate to challenge central government diktats that harm our local communities.

- 1** Boost the numbers of planning officers, including enforcement, tree and landscape officers and work to improve retention of staff in these key posts.
- 2** Introduce a full life-cycle carbon cost assessment to include the potential for the reuse of materials in the determination of planning applications.
- 3** All new builds to be carbon neutral in respect of the build, energy and infrastructure. ►
- 4** All applications will be required to demonstrate an increase net biodiversity. ►
- 5** 'Primary residency' to be part of the planning rules for the whole South Hams implemented through changes to the Joint Local Plan. ►
- 6** Remove all thresholds when assessing applications for affordable housing.
- 7** Enforce strict adherence to s106 and planning conditions, especially on large developments.
- 8** Where sites are allocated in the Joint Local Plan, we will seek for these to be developed by local agents and developers with a proven track record and which can deliver the affordable and social housing we need.
- 9** We will challenge the unreasonable and damaging housing targets imposed by central government on the Council and its partners in the Joint Local Plan.

Town Centres and the Economy

We are lucky to have four vibrant market towns in the South Hams. We also have a number of smaller but equally important community centres including Salcombe and South Brent.

Our objective is to support the local economy, strengthen the opportunities for small and innovate businesses and community enterprises, and help build the skills for the green economy, as well as enabling more sustainable travel options for commuting and leisure.

We also recognise the enormous pressures arising from the cost of living crisis and we commit to spending Council funds wisely and to minimise any increases in Council tax.

- 1** Create a business focused forum through which the Council can work in partnership with all sectors as well as Town and Parish Councils to provide a coordinated approach to creating a thriving and sustainable local economy.
- 2** Continue to support expansion of high-speed internet throughout the South Hams.
- 3** Town centre car parking charges will be reviewed to ensure they are in line with the needs of businesses and the community and the need to reduce the use of cars. This will be part of a Travel Plan.
- 4** Recognise the importance of public toilets and review the provision. Keep our current public toilets open and make them all free to use.
- 5** Support our local leisure and community centres.
- 6** Protect sites (like [Baltic Wharf](#)) from unnecessary and damaging developments and change of use and ensure they are used to build a local sustainable economy for the benefit of all.
- 7** Ensure that projects that have demonstrated community support and benefits, such as the Totnes ATMOS project, are fully backed by the Council and may be progressed by the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders
- 8** The Council's Capital Investment strategies to be based on investment in local community projects and businesses. ▶
- 9** Support our local high streets in towns and villages through investment.
- 10** Provide incentives for local start-up businesses.
- 11** Work to build a local green sustainable economy. ▶
- 12** Create a Council owned company for property and ground maintenance.

Local Democracy and Governance

The direction of the Council needs to be set by elected members. The role of officers is to implement the wishes of its members. The Council has many hard-working and talented officers but the current Scheme of Delegation means officers are not properly held to account by members. All decisions concerning capital projects and other strategic matters will in future be taken by elected councillors and there will be better oversight of all projects.

We will also ensure there is a full and ongoing dialogue with Town and Parish Councils, and community organisations, to ensure we work in partnership with local communities from inception to completion of all projects.

- 1** We will introduce changes to the Council's Constitution to ensure elected members are able to properly and effectively deliver this mandate and can respond to the wishes of the residents which the Council is there to serve. ►
- 2** Create a Town & Parish Council forum to inform strategy and investment in our communities.
- 3** We will work closely with partners and ensure their expertise and local knowledge informs decisions. Democracy will not end at the ballot box but will be the beginning of a dialogue with our communities and their representatives.
- 4** Strengthen the team of 'Localities Officers' that have a huge variety of roles from monitoring public bins and toilets to assessing homes that have applied for funds to adapt them for a resident's disability. Localities Officers are out in our communities everyday doing essential work and need better systems and resources.
- 5** Review the entire capital and investment program. ►
- 6** Review our waste collection and recycling scheme and involve our Town and Parish Councils in deciding the way ahead.
- 7** Ensure there is a regular and uniform street sweeping and litter picking service for all our towns and villages.
- 8** Improve the Planning and Enforcement services. ►
- 9** Devolve assets, including car parks, to relevant Town & Parish Councils. ►
- 10** Create a community/social enterprise support and development hub with dedicated officers.
- 11** Work with schools and youth organisations to give young people a voice so that they feel more included in the discussions leading to decisions that affect them.
- 12** Review all in-house IT systems. ►
- 13** Review the decision to have no receptionist at Follaton House. ►

Health, Wellbeing, Protection and Support

The health and wellbeing of all, young and old, and especially the most vulnerable, is paramount. Much like the need for all policies to take into account climate change and biodiversity loss, all policies will be required to ensure they promote fairness, equality, and access for all.

- 1 Supporting our local leisure and community centres.
- 2 Protecting green spaces and increasing tree preservation orders.
- 3 Supporting the construction of cycle paths and traffic free cycle routes
- 4 Playparks and other assets should belong to their communities.
- 5 Work with volunteer and community groups in partnership.
- 6 Work to tackle poverty. ▶
- 7 Support Dartmoor National Park and the Dartmoor Preservation Society in its campaign to restore the right to camp on the moor.

End of our manifesto

Further Policy Details

This section contains additional notes on the manifesto policies listed above. It provides extra details. The ► symbols in the manifesto link directly to the relevant part of this section.

Housing

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The average house price in the South Hams has increased by 17% in the last 5 years. According to ONS - Affordability data, and the ratio of lower quartile house price (£250,000) to lower quartile gross earnings (£21,521) is now 11.58, which makes the South Hams a member of the worst 30% local authorities for affordability in England and Wales.

Affordable housing is defined in the Nation Planning Policy Framework as homes that are 20% lower than the local average prices. However, mortgage lenders are unlikely to lend more than 5 times earnings. So given a gross income of £21,521, this implies a borrowing limit of £107,605 for a lower quartile earner and an unrealistic deposit of £142,395 on a £250,000 house. The average savings of a lower quartile earner are £2,500. The overall average is £12,500.

The rented sector is therefore hugely important and the South Hams is classified by central government as being a High Affordability Pressure Area, which is where the difference between the average social rents and private rents is £50 per week or more.

We need truly affordable homes and social housing with a mix of tenure types to address these fundamental issues.

1. Local Housing Company

Set up a Local Housing Company through which the Council will seek to rebuild a stock of social housing/accommodation.

Reason: The district needs a mix of truly affordable housing and social housing. The Council needs to rebuild its stock of social housing across the district so that it is provided close to where it is needed. It is currently very difficult to do this directly as a Council as may then need to operate a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) if the stock increased beyond the limit and which comes with a raft of onerous regulations. The Council is a Registered Provider (RP) which presents further issues not least being proposed legislation to extend the Right to Buy to RPs. Sales would result in receipts, but these are rarely sufficient and means the Council is on a treadmill. The proposed company seeks to avoid these burdens and would allow the Council to once again hold a stable and increasing stock of social housing... as it used to prior to 1999 when it was all sold off.

3. Review of all land owned by SHDC

There will be a detailed review of all land owned by SHDC along with its other fixed assets. SHDC currently owns 641 plots of land of varying size totalling 167 Ha. (See also Local Democracy section below)

Reason: We need to be able to provide accommodation where it is needed and to build a portfolio of properties that is guided by need but cannot be met by new builds or other means. Furthermore, in 20/21 the Council was in receipt of £1.88M from the government's Community Housing Fund. Much of this was spent on land which has not been effectively deployed and either needs to be disposed of or used. Some will be suitable for affordable housing.

3a. Ropewalk, Kingsbridge

Use the Ropewalk site in Kingsbridge to build a mix of truly affordable homes and Council owned social housing .

Reason: This site is owned by the Council and so does not have acquisition costs and should be used to address the lack of affordable/social housing and to create a flagship of how such a site can be developed without introducing market-value housing.

4. Property Acquisitions

The Council needs to acquire suitable properties as they become available, including flats over shops and other small properties.

Reason: We need to be able to provide affordable homes where it is needed without resorting to new builds.

10. Primary Residency

Through the use of restrictive covenants and or s106 planning agreements, both of which run with the title of a property and are legally enforceable, we would seek to ensure that all new developments are for primary residence only. (See House of Commons Library [paper](#) that outlines and provides examples.)

Reason: To reduce the number of homes being built or sold on, as buy-to-lets or second-homes, and to make homes more readily available to local people.

12. Explore Innovative Delivery

Evaluate the many alternative ways of delivering truly affordable homes through modular houses, 3-D printed houses, caravan park homes and other means, and deploy as appropriate.

Reason: The need for affordable housing is urgent. Modern techniques can greatly reduce the build time, significantly reduce costs and deliver very energy efficient homes.

Environment

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There is a lot of jargon associated with climate change and the environment. The one that is used a lot here is eCO₂. This is simply the equivalent carbon dioxide that would have the same global warming potential as a mix of greenhouse gases that might include CO₂, methane, nitrous oxide and other greenhouse gases. Some gases have a higher global warming potential than others and this is measured by considering their greenhouse effect and their persistence. Methane has a much higher greenhouse effect than CO₂ but a very much shorter half-life (although as its concentration in the atmosphere rises, so does its half-life ... which is why it is so important to act now to reduce methane emissions).

1. Financial Budget Commitment

There will be an annual budget allocation of at least £0.5M or 5% of the Council's annual budget earmarked for Climate Change and Biodiversity projects. This fund will be managed by a Climate Change and Biodiversity Committee, which will also include representatives from local organisations and experts.

Reason: There are many things the Council can and should be doing. We need to involve partners across the district to build a coherent programme that will deliver the change that is now so urgent.

3. Review of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan

Reason: It currently fails to begin to address the enormity of what we face and needs radical surgery so that it provides a clear path with measurable targets. A revised Action Plan will include but will not be limited to:

3.1 Targeted Home Insulation Loan and Grant Programme to reduce domestic energy consumption by 20%. Domestic carbon emissions account for about 25% of the total. Properly insulated homes are therefore essential to reduce emissions and to reduce energy costs. However, a recent study (the [Energy Crisis Report](#)) suggests that to reduce emissions by 34% would cost £96M, which is way beyond the resources of SHDC. So we need to target the most vulnerable and look at how to get the best affordable efficiency gains from the 18,612 properties identified in the report by:

- creating a comprehensive list of properties to target, with eCO₂ reduction assessment and funding eligibility. Work with local partners and share resources like infrared cameras etc.
- promoting encouraging and helping with [Energy Company Obligation - ECO4](#) , which will help those on qualifying benefits;
- encouraging and supporting [Energy Company Obligation - LA FLEX](#) , which will help those on low incomes but not on benefits;
- engage with the [Energy Redress Fund](#) to ensure all those who are eligible receive help;

- encouraging [Lendology](#) claims, which will help those who can afford a low interest loan;
- building a register of private landlords and working with them to ensure all rented accommodation is EPC band C or above.

3.2 Energy usage reduction linked to Council Tax Reduction Incentives

Better insulation will reduce the demand for energy but there is also a need to reduce demand by lowering heating levels and encouraging the 'heat the body not the building' approach. Those eligible for CTR will be able to apply for help; for instance for a free locally made eco-friendly Hooded Blanket.

3.3 A Traffic Reduction Plan

Commercial and private travel accounts for 40+% of local emissions. The move to electric vehicles (EV) will take time and require huge investment. Devon County Council is planning to provide 2000 charge points across Devon by 2030, as well as gullies in pavements to allow on-street charging. However, the Society of Motor Manufactures and Traders (SMMT) says we will need to 2.3 million [Chargepoints by 2030](#) . Based on population, this means 32,200 in Devon and 2,990 in the South Hams. It is hoped the private sector will fill this very large gap in the next 7 years, but there are many challenges, not least the availability of batteries, the capacity of the grid, and the availability of green power. *So, alongside the move to EV we need to considerably reduce the number and length of journeys, by:*

- Working with groups and DCC to promote active travel and to develop walking and cycle routes and to make bids for [Active Travel Grants](#) .
- Improving public transport availability by working with local providers to develop sustainable strategies; multi-function usage, demand-led services, integrated booking systems, etc.
- With partners develop car sharing and load sharing schemes based on a modern booking and reward systems that will also allow complex journey patterns.
- Providing a range of incentive schemes.
- Helping establish car clubs.
- Reducing workplace parking and encourage public/shared commuter schemes.
- Targeting the need to reduce journeys through an integrated, well designed scheme that addresses the complex causes of traffic volumes on our roads.

3.4 A comprehensive plan to build a sustainable local Green Economy

Driving down eCO2 emissions is a big challenge. Keeping them down is just as big a challenge. We need to established a local economy which has minimal carbon cost (zero or net zero) and one that protects and enhances the environment. A green economy is one that by definition delivers this. There are many models on how to achieve a green economy and we will work with partners like the Exeter University

Centre for Circular Economy. However, it is clear that controlling, directing and managing growth is central to creating a green economy. It is also necessary to create the right conditions and infrastructure:

- Encourage investment in the renewable energy sector including the skills to support and maintain. Build on the Floating Offshore Wind (FLOW) initiative which will create many skilled green jobs and opportunities (see [Baltic Wharf](#)).
- Work with partners to ensure the district has the cross-section of skills to increase the efficiency of homes, install and maintain PVs, install and maintain EV charge points, etc
- Encourage and support the re-use and re-purposing of items and to promote the ideals of a [Circular Economy](#) where ever possible.
- Work to overhaul the [Joint Local Plan](#) (JLP) so that all developments are carbon neutral, both during development and once occupied, and to ensure that any new housing development is addressing a local need by applying a covenant, and that there is a fully appraised biodiversity threshold reached. The current formula of requiring a net gain in biodiversity is flawed and there needs to be a minimum threshold that applies to all sites unless there are exceptional reasons not to.
- Work with partners to ensure there are climate-cafe/drop-in centres in every town in the South Hams and to use these to engage with residents and businesses on how they can meet the challenges of Climate Change and Biodiversity loss and to establish an on-going dialogue with the public on what the Council is or should be doing.

3.5 Install PV over Car Parks

Installing solar PV panels over a car park is cheaper and more effective than installing on rooftops. The Council owns 32 car parks, many of which could have solar panels installed over the parking bays to generate power for EV charge points and for local businesses and households where possible. The following calculation demonstrates the potential and assumes only 50% of the 2,775 parking bays will be suitable (possibly due to shade from buildings or trees).

Number of parking bays: $2775 / 2 = 1387$.

The standard size of a parking bay is $2.4\text{m} \times 4.8\text{m} = 11.52 \text{ m}^2$. So a total available area of $15,978 \text{ m}^2$.

It is general accepted that the peak output from a 1 square metre solar panel is 125 Wp giving $\sim 2000 \text{ kWp}$ overall. Then using the [Photovoltaic Geographical Information System](#) we get an annual figure of $\sim 2000 \text{ MWh}$, which according to Ofgen, is enough to power approximately 475 homes.

3.7 Local Energy Production

Local energy production can take many forms and include a mix of technologies:

- Local community solar farms (Power Allotments)
- Local community owned on-shore wind turbines
- Mini hydroelectric ($<100\text{kW}$) and Pico hydroelectric ($<5\text{kW}$)

- Large scale ground source heat pumps (under football pitches, car parks) providing heating to local business, facilities and homes.
- Large water-source heat pumps that can take advantage of the many rivers across the district, without environmental damage.
- Community energy storage systems (thermal or gravity).

In order to reduce emissions and costs and to make our communities self-reliant it is essential to work with them to help make local energy projects a reality. We will continue to support the Local Energy Bill, which will make these projects much easier, but in the mean time we will work with partners to help form local direct connections and Energy Clubs.

3.8. Local Nature Reserves

[Local Nature Reserves](#) (LNRs) are a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by a principal local authority, which in this case would be South Hams District Council.

The Council will encourage and support applications for LNR status for sites of local interest and will look to use some of the land it owns to create LNRs.

Reason: The need to protect and create wildlife sanctuaries and a network of connecting wildlife corridors is an essential part of a strategy to increase biodiversity. LNRs enjoy an extra level protection from damage and development.

4. Reducing Plastics Pollution

The devastating effects plastics are having on the environment and wildlife is now well understood. It is a great shame the important 'Plastic Pollution Bill' that was introduced to parliament by the Liberal Democrat MP, Alistair Carmichael on Feb 25 2019 did not become law. This bill was drafted by Friends of the Earth and the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI). It aimed to phase out all but the most essential uses of plastic by 2025 and had widespread support. Unfortunately, due to the events at Westminster over the last few years, the bill ran out of time, which also ended its successor introduced in 2022. However, it has forced the matter to be taken seriously by government and there will be a ban on some single-use plastics from October 2023, but it is nothing like sufficient or as comprehensive as the proposals in the bill.

So, while it is good to see central government taking some action, there is also a lot your District Council should be doing as well. For instance:

- Ensure all procurement by the Council minimises its use of plastics, which should include packaging, and require suppliers to the Council to demonstrate they have policies in place to reduce the use of plastics to a minimum.
- Introduce an environmental accreditation scheme and work with businesses to increase awareness of the problem.
- Work with communities to remove plastics from the environment and to reuse plastics.

Local Democracy and Governance

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8a. Improve the Planning Service

Reason: While there have been recent changes, it remains an under resourced service with too few planning officers and too many levels of management. The prioritisation of cases could be greatly improved as could the use of technology. The use of 'independent' planning officers to work on large applications and who are indirectly funded by the applicant should cease.

8b. Overhaul the Enforcement Service

Reason: This service is not effective. It needs more officers, better systems, better prioritisation, better categorisation of cases, better communication with members, better alerting and deadlines. It also needs to prioritise cases involving environmental damage. There needs to be greater involvement of elected members and a delegation scheme that provides the opportunity for cases to be called-in for consideration by a panel of members.

5. Community Investment Strategy

As part of our investment strategy we will build a portfolio of small community investments, with an average return on investment of over 2.5%.

Reason: It is a much better way of distributing and managing risk and it is an approach that plays perfectly into the need to make our communities resilient and sustainable and to promote local self-reliance and the green-economy. The Council needs to invest in the myriad local organisations and local companies. It needs to get involved as a stakeholder, providing expertise as well as finance. For a good overview see Power to Change's paper: [Investing in Localism](#).

5.1 Review Fixed Assets

The Council will review its Fixed Asset Register of almost £100M with a view to deploying these assets to best serve our communities and where appropriate provide funding for community investment, including affordable homes.

5.2 Review Liquid Assets

The Council will review its short- and long-term investments of liquid assets of over £50M to achieve a return of at least 2.5% overall as this is undoubtedly possible without a material increase in risk, and would generate an extra £0.75M for the Council.

9. Devolve Assets

There are many assets held on behalf of Town and Parish Councils (playparks, car parks, etc). The ownership of these assets will be offered back to the relevant local Council.

Reason: To give proper direct control of these assets back to local communities. The District Council will then treat all these assets as equal and will work with the Towns and Parishes to develop these essential community facilities. For instance all playparks will be supported, not just those 'owned' by the Council. Also, in the event of SHDC being absorbed into a Unitary Authority, these assets will then remain in local ownership and control. Some assets will be rented back to the Council.

12. Overview of all in-house IT systems

Reason: The Council needs properly integrated systems in place to be able to deliver an efficient service to the residents it serves. It also needs to be able to readily retrieve data and produce reports which it currently seems unable to do without a great deal of human intervention.

13. Follaton House Receptionist

Review the decision not to have a receptionist.

Reason: Because while many are able and happy to do everything online or on the phone, there are a significant number that find it very difficult and need the help and comfort of dealing directly with a human individual. The Council should not become a faceless corporate. There should be more 'receptions' not fewer. We need drop-in/outreach centres at existing venues in South Brent, Ivybridge, Kingsbridge and Dartmouth. We need to work with partners like the food banks, Citizens Advice and others to provide a cost-effective and efficient service that provides for the vulnerable members of our community.

Health and Wellbeing

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1. Poverty

1.1 Real Living Wage

The Council will become an accredited [Real Living Wage](#) employer and develop an educational programme to promote its benefits across the district.

Reason: Many people are on the National Minimum Wage, also called the National Living Wage for over 25s, but it is insufficient to pay the bills. The level of minimum wage is set by government and is based on a formula that does not reflect people's basic needs. In contrast, the Real Living Wage is based on the cost of living.

1.2 Food Poverty

The Council will actively support the network of food banks across the district and work with local businesses to supply them. It will help establish Community Fridges and local community food production.

Reason: Food poverty, like child poverty, is symptomatic of many underlying social problems which need to be addressed, but it is clearly a problem in itself. The need for food banks was growing before the current cost-of-living crisis.

1.3 Fuel Poverty

To help address Fuel Poverty the Council will prioritise increasing the energy efficiency of those households in fuel poverty and with a low EPC rating

Reason: According to [BEIS Fuel Poverty 2020](#) data, 10.8% of households in the South Hams are in Fuel Poverty (spend more than 10% of income on fuel). The cost-of-living crisis has trebled this number in some areas, so it is not unreasonable to expect the South Hams figure to be close to 20%. This amounts to about 8,000 households that need help.

1.4 General Hardship

The Council provides a range of chargeable services which should be supplied at discounted rates to those in hardship.

Reason: The cost-of-living crisis is affecting many residents and the Council needs to support them, so that they can access the services that the Council provides.

Changes to the Constitution

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The [Constitution of the Council](#) is a very important document as it governs how the Council is run. In its current form it is deeply flawed. For local government to work properly elected members and officers need to work as a team. While members delegate authority to officers to implement policy and deliver services, the responsibility remains with members who therefore need to be in effective control through procedures that ensure dialogue, accountability and transparency. To achieve this there need to be the following changes and additions:

- 1** Unauthorised spending limits should be returned to £10,000. (It was recently increased to £100,000)
Reason: To ensure the prudent control of spending and elected members' involvement in spending decisions.
- 2** All projects of a gross value in excess of £100,000 should be scrutinised by the Audit Committee at least once every 3 months.
Reason: To provide proper oversight of projects and to avoid the many expensive project failures of the last few years.
- 3** Only allow the Monitoring Officer to disallow a Motion for debate if it is proposing something that it can be proven would be unlawful.
Reason: To prevent the stifling of democratic debate and to allow elected members to lobby central government or debate any matter they feel is important to their residents.
- 4** The Senior Leadership Team of officers will hold a general Question and Answer session for elected members once every 2 months.
Reason: To improve dialogue and accountability and provide an opportunity for open and informal discussion between officers and members.
- 5** Officers will endeavour to answer any questions put to them by members or refer them to someone who can. The only exception will be where there may be a breach of confidentiality in which case arrangements will be made to ensure the member's question is fully answered and confidentiality preserved.
Reason: To ensure members are able to properly discharge their duty of overseeing the delegated activities of officers.
- 6** There will be a Consultation Protocol that ensures that all projects undertake full, proper and ongoing consultation during the lifetime of the project.
Reason: To ensure that local members, Town and Parish Councils, and local residents are able to input into a project and are kept fully informed of progress.
- 7** Any emergency powers granted to officers must be time-limited and only retained if ratified by Full Council within 14 days and every 28 days thereafter, by a vote or a remote consultative process (as has been operated successfully and without challenge by East Devon District Council for several years).

Reason: To avoid the prolonged and unacceptable setting aside of democracy that was endured during Covid-19 and to ensure elected members are able to exercise proper democratic control over how an emergency is managed.

- 8** No changes to the constitution should be made without full consultation with all members and approved by Full Council. Minor changes may be made but only where they are limited to correcting or improving layout, spelling or grammar.

Reason: To put an end to creeping changes being introduced by officers and to underline that the Constitution is owned by elected members.

- 9** All reports commissioned internally or externally by the Council will be made available to elected members on receipt.

Reason: To improve transparency and shared responsibility. Every member has a duty to respect and protect confidentiality, but confidentiality should never be used to limit access and members' ability to know the full facts and to be able to question and hold the Council to account.

- 10** The Executive will not reserve any matter to itself without the explicit and conditional authority of Full Council. Where such authority has not been given it will be a matter for the Full Council.

Reason: To ensure proper democratic control of decision making and to ensure that the Executive is not able reserve matters to itself by default and thereby exclude members ability to vote on important topics, as it can at the moment, and has been used to stifle debate on topics like Climate Change.

- 11** Scrap the 20-word limit on Questions to Council.

Reason: It is quite unnecessary and makes it impossible to provide context for a question, resulting in a lack of proper understanding by the public and members of the purpose of a question, and indeed the answer.

- 12** Motions not heard at Council meetings, due to a time limit of *1 hour* for motions, are rolled over to the next meeting.

Reason: So that motions are always heard and there is not the unseemly lottery of who gets a motion in first in the run-up to every Council meeting.