



To all Town and Parish Clerks  
Mid Devon District

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26 October 2022

Dear Town or Parish Clerk

As you will be aware, the recent inflationary pressures facing councils at all levels of community representation have meant that councillors (and their councils) are now charged with the most rigorous prioritisation of public expenditure that we have seen since the austerity programme implemented in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. At the present time, it is unclear how local government public services will be financed over the longer-term with commitments to funding reviews and the considerations of business rates being delayed, and with announcements on precepting levels for principal councils (including those linked to social care provision) being subject to annual decision by central government.

You will all know about the funding cuts over the last decade, but the cost of living (inflation) crisis is now visiting additional pressures on service provision linked to material, energy and resourcing costs. All these costs are escalating dramatically, adding in excess of 10% to many of our in-year costs. Just to give some financial context, this current financial challenge is already adding circa £1m of unplanned costs to the Council's 2022/23 financial position and is highly unlikely to return to anything like "normal" before we set our 2023/24 budget.

At the current time we are not only reflecting on 2022/23 financial pressures, we are already planning for 2023/24 and the next few years thereafter, referred to as our Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Based on current and future projections of inflation, interest rates, levels of government funding, referendum limits, pay awards, service demand/usage levels, etc., we are estimating a budget gap of £2.111m for 2023/24 growing to £5.219m by 2025/26. This is clearly a very stark message.

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Therefore, we need to take both urgent and significant action. Our Cabinet will be receiving an MTFP report at its early November meeting, which will consider remedial in-year action and begin to plan for further longer-term saving measures. As part of these considerations we clearly need to look at all levels/quality and methods of delivery of our current service provision. This review will also need to take account of statutory and discretionary provision and re-examine all of our fees/charges that we levy.

Against this challenging backdrop, the District Council is seeking to explore all such avenues as might exist to retain the majority of the service provision that our communities rely upon. In order to maintain service levels throughout the District we need your help and support. A number of our discretionary services are spread out across the whole of the District and to this end we would like you to consider whether you would be able to either provide some of these services directly or make a contribution to their ongoing delivery – or even improved delivery, should you consider this appropriate or meriting your investment.

We fully appreciate that many of you already have already provided assistance over the last few years and we would be very keen to learn from these arrangements to ensure that any future service delivery models are based on your input and lived experience, in order that we stand the best possible chance of being successful for our residents. However, we also need to be realistic that the national debate around funding local government is unlikely to see substantial investment in our services in the short-term. Therefore, we are likely to see the reduction of some services unless Town and Parish Councils work with us to enable continuity. In the absence of sufficient funding, the Council will inevitably have to focus on the service provision required of us by law (statutory functions) to continue to ensure its legal obligations are met.

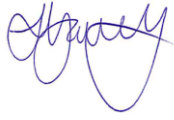
The services we are now considering for new or further support with are: grounds maintenance, parks/play areas, street cleansing, amenity car parks, cemetery maintenance, community grants, enforcement/CCTV, open spaces and public conveniences. However, we would certainly be interested to hear from any Town or Parish on any other area of service provision where it believes it has the capacity and ability to assist.

We appreciate that this is a challenging message, but these are challenging times. We wanted to get this message out to you all as soon as possible as we understand that most of you set your precepts over the next few months. At the current time this letter is an advance notice as to our thinking and the considerations that will be the focus of our councillors over the coming weeks and months. We will be pleased to have a discussion with you or your councils on an informal basis prior to anything being formalised and clearly we will provide further information as discussions progress in order for you to understand what is being requested, i.e. costs, level of service currently being delivered, when/how, etc.

Town and Parish councils are a vital part of the ecosystem of community support and service provision and I will be copying this letter to the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) officers as I'm aware how much good work and best practice exists from utilising relationships with DALC members. The wider 'Team Devon' approach benefits significantly from DALC's involvement and engagement, and we look forward to working with you all to provide the best possible outcomes for our communities and citizens, our people and places.

Should you wish to discuss this request in more detail please feel free to contact me at [ajarrett@middevon.gov.uk](mailto:ajarrett@middevon.gov.uk)

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Jarrett', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Andrew Jarrett  
**Deputy Chief Executive (S151)**