

January 2026 newsletter from County Councillor Henry Gent for parishes in the Broadclyst Division

Local Government Reorganisation(LGR) and the next round of elections

Towards the end of November DCC submitted its proposal for a unitary authority covering all of Devon except the two existing unitaries of Plymouth and Torbay. The district councils and the unitaries have come up with their own, different, proposals. Government will decide which proposal to take forward for elections in May 2027.

In mid-December the government announced that councils facing LGR can postpone elections due in May 2026. Elections are not due at East Devon DC or DCC but it does potentially impact on Exeter City Council. DCC will be holding an extraordinary meeting of the full council on 9th January in response to this announcement.

DCC children's services reports by Ofsted and D of E

DCC children's services were judged inadequate in January 2020 and again in January 2025. So DCC are pleased with the report of a monitoring visit by Inspectors in November 2025 which focused on care leavers, and found "a much-needed programme of improvements across children's services." Subsequently, in December, Devon's Children's Commissioner from the D of E acknowledged significant progress in improving services for children and families, and warned against the risk of breaking up the service as part of LGR.

[Commissioner praises improvements in Devon's children's services](#)

Auto enrolment for Free School Meals

In December, DCC became the first two-tier authority to achieve auto-enrolment for Free School Meals (FSMs), thereby unlocking Pupil Premium funding. FSMs are available to pupils whose parents are in receipt of a range of benefits and – until now - a claim must be made by the parent or another responsible adult before the pupil becomes entitled. Pupil Premium funding is then allocated to schools based on the number of pupils eligible for FSMs or have been recorded as eligible in the past 6 years.

As of Spring 2024, in Devon Local Authority schools it was estimated that 19.9% of pupils were eligible for FSM. However, it is calculated that nationally at least 10% of families who are entitled to FSMs do not apply to receive them. This could be because of language or technical barriers to application, for example.

If pupils are well nourished, they are better able to learn in class, and this can lead to increased attainment. FSMs are also important because the associated Pupil Premium funding means schools can offer more targeted interventions and extra support to these students.

As Pupil Premium Funding is allocated to schools based on the number of pupils who are recorded as eligible for FSMs, schools were missing out on at least 10% of their Pupil Premium entitlement if all eligible families registered. Auto-enrolment has unlocked about £1.5m in pupil premium for Devon schools.

Primary school places in our area

Unfortunately there is going to continue to be a shortage of primary school places in the Broadclyst and Cranbrook area until at least 2028. The new primary school at Cobdens, (Cranbrook,) will not be finished before September 2027. The new primary school at Tithebarn is still at a very early stage of the project: the overall cost is not yet certain and the earliest that it could be finished is September 2028. This is bad news for some families in Cranbrook and Tithebarn; their children may not get a place in reception in the nearest school. In September 2025 some families at Tithebarn did not get places in their first, second, or third choice, being

the three closest primary schools. Since then more houses have been built, so we can expect a similar outcome in 2026. This is very disappointing. In my view there has been a degree of complacency about the situation: the overall number of pupils in Devon is falling; the education authority is fulfilling its statutory obligation to provide enough pupil places overall. But that's not much help if the school capacity is in the wrong places.

Anaerobic Digester (AD) plant at Clyst St Mary

This AD is responsible for many of the convoys of silage trailers and slurry tankers on the roads at all times of the year in most of the villages in our area. I get complaints about this haulage which looks agricultural, but in my opinion is industrial. I recently objected to the discharge of a planning condition for this anaerobic digester at Clyst St Mary. The discharge of condition was subsequently refused, I am glad to say. Where an anaerobic digester relies heavily on purpose-grown crops such as maize, lifecycle assessments increasingly show that the climate benefits are marginal and may, in some cases, be worse than grid-average electricity once transport, fertiliser use, and land-use impacts are accounted for. In other words, it's making more global warming than average gas or electricity. We would all be better off without it but instead it enjoys a government subsidy and planning permission. I therefore support the planning conditions to control the sources of the feedstock and the destinations of the digestate. This application would have contravened those conditions and I am glad it was refused.

[Discharge of Condition for 22/1104/VAR: Condition 12 \(Off-site Storage\) - Enfield Farm Biodigester Oil Mill Lane Clyst St Mary EX5 1AF](#)

Locality funding

Each county councillor has an annual Locality Budget, £8,000 in the current year, to make grants to support projects or activities that benefit the communities they represent. More information about eligibility and the process is here:

[Locality budgets - Democracy in Devon](#)

Here are the projects that I have supported so far this year.

Grant Beneficiary	Purpose of Grant	Requested	Reference	
Double Elephant CIC	Costs towards a heritage project	£250.00	LB006	
Parklife SW CIC	Improvement to pond and surrounding habitat at St Martins School	£1,000.00	LB033	
Clyst St Lawrence Parish Meeting	Defibrillator	£250.00	LB059	
Cranbrook Town Council	Computers for free to access terminals at the CTC office	£845.00	LB120	
Brampford Speke PC	Replacement public bench and repairs to a public notice board	£300.00	LB164	

Brampford Speke PC	Heated Cabinet for a defibrillator	£271.80	LB220	
Green Futures Devon CIC	Towards advice and raising awareness to reduce the use of pesticides	£250.00	LB225	
Bishops Clyst Parish Council	Replacement of the Platinum Jubilee English Oak Tree	£121.36	LB272	
East Devon District Council	Feasibility Study to develop proposals for improvements for pedestrians and cyclists to the B3181	£770.00	LB333	
Inclusive Exeter CIC	Towards costs for a multi-cultural Christmas celebration	£200.00	LB402	
Broadclyst Environment Group	Insurance costs and consumables for a repair café	£150.00	LB430	
Green Futures Devon CIC	Survey of local Council's weed management plans	£200.00	LB441	not yet paid