

Cllr Steve Keable

March 2026

Devon County Councillors Report - Creedy, Taw & Mid Exe:

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Mid Devon Councillors Report - Taw Vale:

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Welcome to the March Newsletter - The big issue this month is to explain about our Council Tax ...

The 2026-27 budget is the first opportunity the new County Administration elected last May has had to shape and determine the priorities for the next 3-years, in the first multi-year settlement in a long time.

Prioritising roads, children and SEND services in our £839million budget

Stay informed about local decisions, community initiatives, and opportunities to have your say

Council Tax takes the strain

Including the 2% allowance Government made some years ago for Adult Care, Council tax will be up by the maximum permitted 4.99%. Government continues to reduce grant and puts pressure on local councils to make up the difference or cut services, rather than to fund from central taxes.

4.99% amounts to £1.73 a week increase on a Band D property and less for Bands A-C property where most people live. To balance income against expenditure DCC has also to deliver just under £39m of savings or find alternative income.

Council Tax was never designed to fund something as large and complex as adult social care or children's services. We disappointed that Devon's 'settlement' announced by Government in mid-February failed to recognise rurality by restoring the £10m removed in 2025.

Devon is large, dispersed, aging and rural. Delivering services here costs more. Distances are greater, workforce markets thinner and economies of scale are hard to achieve. While these rural cost drivers are not recognised by Government in national funding, we will continue to press that case firmly and consistently.

From April, the County will spend £839.2 million on day-to-day services next year: up 4.1% than in 2025-26. Councillors also agreed a £770.6 million capital investment programme covering the five years from 2026/27 to 2030/31.

This money will be used for major projects such as road repairs, new school places, support for children with special educational needs, and improvements to council buildings across Devon.

Roads and transport

Spending on highways maintenance will rise to £32.4 million in 2026/27.

- £4m additional revenue funding for drainage, gully clearance, ditching, vegetation management and preventative works.

£15m additional capital from April for targeted investment in preventative maintenance, resurfacing, patching and serviceability.

- A further £10m matched-funding opportunity for parish & town councils is to be developed.

£0.5m to strengthen highways inspection, quality assurance, engagement & communications.

Additionally, over the next five years, £546.1 million in total will be invested in highways. This includes an extra £55 million over five years for preventative maintenance.

Libraries

The misleading stories of libraries closing in recent months are not true. Two separate things have been happening 1) consultation about the running of libraries and 2) setting the budget for April.

The County Council before last May had set a course of budget reduction for the library service beyond 2025-26. It is this that has been reversed with additional £425k to support delivery, in addition:

- An additional £225k to restore the book replacement fund to £0.5m
- £1m reserve for Libraries and Rural Hubs to implement the transformation and community-led improvement through the consultation where 22,000 people have responded to the consultation.

Children and families

The Children and families budget will see the largest increase in funding across the council. Spending will rise to £268 million in 2026/27, an increase of £19.1 million. This reflects growing pressure on children's social care, early help for families, and support for children who cannot live at home.

- £76.5 million will be invested over five years in children's homes, school expansions and specialist education provision.
- Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities remains a key priority. Over the next five years, £25.8 million will be spent on new and expanded specialist schools to create more places for children who need extra support.

Adult social care

Adult social care continues to be the council's biggest area of spending. The budget for adult social care will rise to £395.9 million in 2026/27, an increase of £9.9 million, or 2.6 per cent. This helps cover rising costs, including higher wages for care staff.

- £51.6 million investment over five years to help adults live independently, including adaptations to homes and investment in care facilities and equipment.

The budget was supported by all political parties with 52 voting in favour, 0 against and 2 abstentions.

"This is a budget built on fiscal responsibility."

Councillor James Buczkowski, Devon County Council's Cabinet Member for Finance

SEND

The Government's announcement to fund much of the SEND deficit support is welcomed. This is not new money but to clear the tab that has accumulated over the years of national policy expansion, and without funding it. This tab deficit was being picked up through Devon County finance. This cash impact is significant as it strengthens the DCC balance sheet and materially improves our treasury position – higher cash balance improves liquidity, reduces exposure to short-term borrowing and allows more efficient capital financing decisions.