

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14TH DECEMBER 2020**

**REPORT ON THE PORTFOLIO OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING
AND ECONOMIC REGENERATION**

THE SERVICE

The service covers the Council's economic development, regeneration, growth, delivery and planning functions. Building Control, whilst delivered via a partnership arrangement, also sits within this service for management purposes. The Corporate Plan 2020-2024 identifies the strands of homes, economy, community and environment with an emphasis on sustainability through sustainable and prosperous communities, a sustainable planet and sustainable participation. The Council is creating strategic partnerships with other authorities in the areas of economy and planning and is working to a shared strategy for economic growth and prosperity. The Council is currently exploring with former Greater Exeter Strategic Plan partners how cross-boundary planning matters can be considered in a coordinated and focused way.

The structure of the service seeks to be responsive to the needs of this growth agenda and allow for this part of the organisation to adapt a more external facing and interventionist role in securing the delivery of growth and infrastructure including its funding.

1.0 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Introduction

Over the majority of 2020 the work of this part of the service has been dominated by responding to needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The effect of the pandemic continues to have an enormous impact on the national as well as local economy. The UK has now formally entered a recession, having had two consecutive quarters of economic decline. Between the first and second quarter, the economy has shrunk by 20.4%, the largest decline seen in the UK since quarterly records began. Despite early signs of encouraging recovery it has been reported that the rate of recovery across the UK has significantly slowed, and in some cases further declined, after reaching a peak on September 4th 2020. A second period of national restrictions commenced on 5th November 2020 and is due to finish on 2nd December after which a tier system will be employed. At time of writing, Devon will be classified as a Tier 2 area once the second period of national restriction ends. Temporary easing of restrictions is due to take place between 23rd and 27th December 2020.

Devon County Council modelling evidence prior to the second national restriction period suggested that the Mid Devon economy will retract by around 10% (roughly 3% more than the rest of the UK) and it anticipates a 5-year recovery journey. This recovery period is expected to be extended once the second period of national restriction has been accounted for within the modelling. The effects of the pandemic continue to have a significant impact on Mid Devon businesses. In terms of resilience, micro and small businesses

with premises have had greater protection than some other businesses. This is because many of them have been eligible for Government grants and benefit from the furloughing scheme. These initiatives have enabled many small businesses to cover essential bills during lockdown and keep staff on. However the effect on the labour market is significant.

The biggest concern for the District is the rise in unemployment. Between March 2020 and September 2020, the claimant count for Mid Devon has risen from 820 claimants to 2,055 claimants. With a large number of Mid Devon employees currently furloughed, there is a significant risk that the number of claimants could substantially increase when furloughing comes to a close. With furloughing previously expected to finish at the end of October many businesses reviewed their position and acted in advance of the announcements of further furlough scheme extension. Work undertaken by Devon County Council predicts that the effect on the Unemployment Claimant Count (% of Workforce 16-64) could range from an increase from 1.7% in March 2020 to between 6.1% and 9% in March 2021. To help counter this risk, the team is exploring projects with DWP and Devon County Council to provide support to help people get back into work as quickly as possible.

COVID-19 work has had to take precedence over other competing priorities given the importance of grant funding to the District's businesses and community support activities. A number of planned projects have been postponed to accommodate the emergency work and recovery planning. Reports on the response to the pandemic from an economic development and community support perspective have been presented to the Economy Policy Development Group and significant efforts have been made to keep the wider Membership updated as the pandemic, its economic impacts and initiatives both in terms of emergency response and recovery planning as the situation has evolved.

1.2 Emergency Response

Since the start of the pandemic a wide range of emergency support activities have been undertaken by the District Council for local businesses and for the vulnerable. These have largely been funded from central government funds; some of which have now closed. Some existing schemes have continued, whilst others have been triggered by new initiatives and the forthcoming Tier 2 designation. Throughout this period the Council's website has been continuously updated to reflect the current situation and help signpost opportunities for businesses such as those provided through the Growth Hub. The Growth, Economy and Delivery team has been working alongside the Revenues and Benefits team in processing the Government funded business grants.

More detail on the grants and other emergency support streams is in **Appendix 1** to this report.

Business Assistance

The Growth, Economy and Delivery team has been working alongside the Revenues and Benefits team in processing Government funded business

grants. Over £20 million of business grants have been issued following more than 1,700 applications. This relates to the initial scheme up to the 28th of August close. The Government Discretionary Grant Scheme has been available to businesses which did not qualify under the previous grants, and which fell within certain criteria, such as operating from shared workspace, or operating within one of the District's priority business sectors. Launched at the end of May, the scheme has now closed and all grant payments have been made. The scheme supported over 220 businesses, providing £1,129,000 in grants and helping to protect over 910 local jobs.

Prior to the latest national restrictions the GED team has been developing the application process for the next Government grant scheme, to be delivered to local businesses mandated to close if a local lockdown is put in place. Mid Devon is leading on the development of the application process and has been sharing this work with other Devon local authorities to ensure as far as possible that the application process is consistent across the County.

The GED team continues to signpost businesses to the Growth Hub for information relating to Government loan schemes and other support. The team has also been liaising with members and local MPs in circumstances where businesses are still falling through the gaps in support provision.

Community Support Plan for Vulnerable Residents

Up until the end of July, when 'shielding' formally came to an end, the Council's Shielding Hub did exceptional work to support vulnerable residents with essential food supplies and other support. Over that period the hub received 136 referrals, 295 enquiries and delivered 130 emergency food packs and 105 top-up packs. Although August and early September saw a pause in activity, plans were being developed with Devon Council County and other Devon Districts to manage potential local outbreaks.

Following the recent surge in coronavirus nationally, these preparations have been accelerated, and officers are now actively engaging with voluntary sector partners and town and parish councils to put in place a community support plan for vulnerable residents in the event of a local or national lockdown. The emphasis will be on local support rather than centralised food distribution. The level of support being offered is potentially very different than during the first lockdown, with a greater emphasis on helping people remain independent.

The Government has updated its advice to those who are clinically extremely vulnerable (the 'shielding' group) but it is anticipated that a formal shielding programme will only be re-instated in the most serious situation. There are currently no areas in the country who have re-instated shielding.

The Community Support Hub has been stood up during the second lockdown, and although numbers of requests have been small, the team has done well to field all requests and to signpost to relevant services where necessary. In total, we have received 54 national referrals and 32 local referrals, only one of which required further practical support. Following the move into Tier 2 on the 2nd December, "Clinically Extremely Vulnerable" (CEV) individuals will no

longer be able to register their requests for support on the national registration service, and any requests will need to come through the Council's online form or telephone helpline. The National Registration System will only come back into place if we move into Tier 3. The Housing Team, together with colleagues from Leisure, have made welfare checks on over 1,880 residents over the course of the lockdown. This work has been extremely important in supporting vulnerable tenants.

Reopening our High Streets Safely

The Reopening High Streets Safely Fund (RHSSF) was launched by Government earlier in the year, funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with £73,686 being awarded to Mid Devon. This initiative is to put in place measures to establish a safe trading environment for businesses and customers, particularly in high streets. Eligible interventions include communications/public information, business facing awareness raising activities and temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely. Liaison continues with the Town Councils and other partners with regard to ongoing review of the risk assessments for the towns.

Our Communication Strategy sought to publicise the changes to the town centres, reinforce safety messages and provide increased confidence to visitors. Further to previous media campaigns and adverts it had been intended to run additional campaigns promoting Mid Devon towns and crucially reinforcing safety measures. The second period of national restrictions have necessitated the modification of these messages and the updating of town centre risk assessments.

1.3 Planning for Recovery

1.3.1 National

The situation is changing daily with the Government frequently bringing in new approaches and schemes which local authorities must adapt to and deliver swiftly. In addition to the government initiatives referred to elsewhere in the report there have been some notable recent developments:

Self-Employment Income Support Scheme

This scheme is another iteration of the previous COVID-19 grant initiative for self-employed individuals, or members of a partnership, whose business has been adversely affected by the Coronavirus. A third tranche of this scheme opened at the end of November for claims until 29th January 2021.

Eat Out to Help Out

This scheme ran from 3rd to 31st August 2020 and was valid Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Businesses could register to be part of the national discount voucher programme. Mid Devon eateries were able to use the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme to offer a discount to customers and encourage them to dine at their premises. The Government would then reimburse the difference for a 50% discount on food and non-alcoholic drinks to eat or drink in of up to a maximum of £10 per diner.

Business and Planning Act 2020

The Business and Planning Act 2020 was passed into law on 22nd July 2020. The relevant parts of this new legislation (covered in this report) are aimed at supporting businesses and helping them to reopen following the gradual lifting of COVID-19 related restrictions. From a licensing perspective, it introduced a significant new licensing regime for 'pavement licences', which enabled premises serving food and drink to provide seating (and serve) customers on certain highways. It also amends existing provisions within the Licensing Act 2003, providing an automatic extension to the terms of 'ON' sale alcohol licences to allow 'OFF' sales until the end of September 2021.

1.3.2 Regional/ Countywide

Team Devon

Team Devon is a public and private sector partnership drawing in expertise from business, education, skills and public sector organisations to prepare a plan for economic recovery in the County. Mid Devon Officers have been active partners in the process. Other contributors to the 'Team Devon' recovery work include business representatives, Devon's County, District and City Councils, the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, Dartmoor National Park and Devon's MP's.

The Devon COVID-19 Economy and Business Recovery Prospectus was launched on 3rd July 2020 by 'Team Devon'. The document sets out Devon's shared vision for economic recovery over the next two years a single economic programme for the County to respond to the crisis and build the Devon economy back stronger and more resilient. It aligns activities to address the hardest hit places, communities and business sectors and capitalise on emerging new opportunities.

The Prospectus focuses upon securing support and delivering relief in four core areas: Our Businesses, Our Places, Our People and Our Opportunities. The document sets out a vision for recovery however the partnership recognises that action will not be possible without appropriate resources. Given the scale of the challenge faced, existing resources alone will not be enough to see Devon return to its pre COVID-19 status. As a result the document forms a basis to lobby Government and others for investment. The immediate priorities are seeking an investment of £56 million into local projects that will assist businesses to re-open, adapt and grow, help young people and those at risk of redundancy find or keep a job, and invest in Devon's hardest hit communities and sectors. This initial package aims to safe-guard and create 6,500 jobs, assist the delivery of 5,000 training places and support 7,500 businesses, stimulating business investment and accelerating economic recovery to pre-COVID levels much sooner.

Any national business grant scheme underspends are currently due to be recovered by Government. Lobbying is taking place at the local level with all councils across Devon having agreed a proposition to put to our MPs with a view to them supporting the local retention of underspend with Ministers in BEIS and wider government as necessary. The intention being to try and

locally retain all the underspend in Devon by demonstrating how this could be deployed alongside existing Devon County Council, LEP and ERDF (European) funding streams to maximise impact and create a £60m investment package (the collective underspend across Devon is circa £37.7m (Mid Devon £2.9m)). The proposition would focus on the below packages with around £15m funding to each:

- SME support
- Green Recovery
- Skills and Employment Support
- Levelling Up Places

Subject to the result of this lobbying, support package opportunities may therefore arise necessitating a rapid and agile response to maximise any benefits for Mid Devon.

Devon partners believe that they can build Devon back better and help create a more inclusive, sustainable and greener economy. This will include recognition of the importance of environmental technology and clean growth.

Team Devon, with input from Mid Devon Officers, is currently preparing implementation plans to deliver the Recovery Prospectus aspirations.

Recovery Interventions and Prioritisation

A range of initiatives are aimed at supporting businesses and striving towards building the economy back better. The County Council is setting out a package of support and seeking funding of circa £60million to take forward a number of the priorities, working with Team Devon partners to deliver the 'Team Devon' COVID-19 Economy and Business Recovery Prospectus. The prospectus focuses upon securing support and delivering relief in four core areas: Our Businesses, Our Places, Our People and Our Opportunities. More detail is provided in **Appendix 1**.

All of the above indicates the range of emergency and recovery activities and that the GED team is operating within and responding to a dynamic of a constantly changing situation.

1.4 Brexit

The United Kingdom withdrew from the European Union on 31 January 2020. Talks continue about the future relationship between the UK and the EU during the 11 month transition period. During this period travel to EU countries, working with them and the way companies do business has remained the same. These arrangements all end on 31 December 2020 with new requirements for export, import, tariffs, data and hiring. At time of writing a new UK-EU trade deal has not been concluded. The GED service has sought to provide signposting advice via the Council's website to help local businesses and affected workers prepare.

1.5 Mills Project update

The Hydro Mills project aims to restore Mid Devon's historic mills, leats and weirs, to generate local, clean, sustainable energy for businesses, residents and public buildings. It aims to be a catalyst for attracting investment from the low carbon business sector, and addresses a number of issues of national significance, including the climate emergency, flood risk mitigation and energy resilience.

A full feasibility of the Tiverton Weir project has been completed. Environment Agency permissions have all been applied for (and are awaiting decisions) as has planning permission. The planning application is currently under consideration and will be determined at a future meeting of Planning Committee.

The Hydro Mills Group (an entity consisting of riparian owners) have also been moving forward with schemes at Flockmill, near Rewe, and Thorverton (Manor) Mill in parallel with work in Tiverton. The intention is to share the learning from these projects to encourage others to consider hydroelectric schemes at their sites.

2.0 PLACE

2.1 Town Centre Masterplans

A masterplan for the regeneration of Cullompton Town centre is in the process of preparation with consultants having been engaged. The intent is to support the regeneration of the town in conjunction with the provision of major infrastructure projects. Stage 1 scoping consultation took place in early 2020 and the preparation of a draft masterplan is well advanced and will be considered at a meeting of Cabinet in the next few months for stage 2 public consultation purposes before refinement and adoption. This masterplan forms part of wider interlinked initiatives for Cullompton.

The first of two stages of public consultation on the Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan has been completed. A draft masterplan, commenced by the consultants acting on behalf of the Council, is being considered by Officers. A report on progress was considered at meeting of Cabinet in August 2020 at which time the potential locations of interventions were endorsed as was the need to review and re-evaluate in light of the challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Revision are being undertaken to the draft masterplan document with the intention to bring it before Cabinet in the next few months for public consultation purposes. A series of engagement meetings to inform the emerging work is being established.

Cabinet at its meeting on 7th March 2019 agreed that consultants will be engaged to deliver the proposed masterplan with work expected to commence on its production in 2020/21. Crediton Town Council will be offered the opportunity to participate in the procurement process and stakeholder events. Their views over appropriate participants from the town and consultation events will also be sought. Due to the prioritisation of service resources to the COVID-19 emergency response, it is now likely that the

commissioning of this work will now be initiated either quarter 4 20/21 or quarter 1 21/22.

In the face of COVID-19 impact, all the masterplanning activity across the towns in Mod Devon has taken on a new context and significance as part of wider economic recovery efforts. Existing work has had to be reframed within the updated economic position arising from the pandemic.

2.2 Cullompton Heritage Action Zone Project

An important element of Cullompton's town centre regeneration is the ambitious heritage project. Cullompton's successful bid for High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) project funding was formally announced by Historic England on the 19th September 2020. A Cullompton HAZ Project Officer has been appointed and commenced duties on the 14th September 2020.

Key projects within the programme are as follows:

- Initial contact with landlords of high and medium priority buildings (October– December 2020)
- Cultural Programme funding application deadline (December 2020)
- Community Engagement Plan (December 2020)
- Monitoring and evaluation plan (December 2020)
- Grants guidelines and applications open (January 2021)
- Cullompton Conservation Area Management Plan update (March 2021)
- Mid Devon Shopfront Design guide (March 2021)
- Higher Bullring Public Realm Enhancement

2.3 Tiverton Market

Tiverton Market has played an important role over 2020 as a source of fresh produce during periods of national restriction during which it remained operational in line with Government guidance and with stringent control and sanitation measures to ensure public safety. It also formed the base from which an extensive food box scheme was successfully run by several traders during the first national lockdown period.

2.4 Garden village project

In the past year work has been continuing to progress Culm Garden Village (CGV) in several key areas:

- **Stage 1 Masterplanning (Vision, Concept and Issues version of the SPD)** - Documents produced and consulted on (in 2019) with subsequent approval by MDDC and highlighting of key areas of focus and issues for taking forward in Stage 2 work.
- **Stage 2 Masterplanning (Framework MP and SPD)** - Stakeholder engagement has continued in various thematic work areas refine the vision and concept proposals to provide clarity over the local expression of vision and objectives for the next stage of the master planning work. A Brief has

been written and commissioning material is being prepared ready for tender in January 2021 for commissioning of the next key component of the garden village's masterplanning and evidence base work. This will produce the final version of the CGV Master Plan SPD document to guide delivery of the first 1,750 homes alongside the production of a comprehensive Master Plan Framework and Infrastructure Delivery Plan for the wider garden village project of some 5,000 homes.

- Thematic Working Groups - Drawing on the key areas identified through the Stage 1 master planning work, a series of technical working groups have been established with key stakeholders and community representatives to develop design and delivery solutions in key areas including: Green & Blue Infrastructure; Health & Wellbeing; Economy and Employment; Climate Change, Energy & Waste; Stewardship & Delivery; Infrastructure & Facilities; and Transport & Connections.
- Planning Application(s) at CGV - Collaborative work has continued with CGV promoters on evidence base, land uses, infrastructure requirements, and spatial masterplanning for the Local Plan allocation area and the wider garden village area. This work has highlighted the potential capacity of the site, key infrastructure, and delivery considerations as well as decisions and choices for disposition of uses and potential approaches to implementing and delivering the vision and concept at the garden village. The evidence produced has informed and shaped the Stage 2 master planning commission work.
- Delivery Models and Vehicles - Options, preferences and a route map for implementation of potential delivery vehicles, including potentially at Culm GV need further consideration. An Expression of Interest was submitted to MHCLG for consideration of further support in exploring innovative delivery models in the area. This is also providing the basis for further work at a project specific level for CGV.
- Cullompton Town Centre Relief Road (HIF MV Scheme) - Timely delivery of the relief road will unlock road capacity to enable delivery of the first 500 homes at CGV (a figure which has been set through other planning application/appeal decisions made by PINs in the wider Cullompton Area and which relates to the capacity of nearby J28 of the M5 motorway).
- M5 Motorway Junction 28 Strategic Solution - resolving a solution to the current capacity limitations at J28 is an essential infrastructure requirement to the delivery of the garden village and a key ingredient for progress of key milestones. A key piece of technical work is the preparation of a Strategic Outline Business Case for the proposed solution(s). Significant initial work has been carried out by Devon County Council (DCC) over the last year to support the early stages of the SOBC process relating to updating of traffic modelling, topographical analysis, and extensive assessment of a long list of options for the strategic solution. The options include and range from public transport lead solutions to improvements to the existing junctions and new junction arrangements. The Council has established a J28 Technical Working

Group with attendees from DfT, Highways England; Homes England; DCC and MDDC in order to agree and guide the further work related to M5 J28.

- Culm Garden Village Country Park - The Stage 1 master planning work and an overwhelming majority of consultation responses highlighted the importance to the overall CGV concept of the (early) delivery of a Country Park. The public consultation further emphasised the importance of the Country Park as a key community benefit and core element of the infrastructure package to deliver a high quality garden community and place at Culm. Work has since continued with stakeholders and potential delivery bodies to develop the concept for the Park further and will be a key focus for the proposed Stage 2 master planning and design work. Its potential location in the area of the site containing the River Culm means progressing the ideas are also a central component of delivering against objectives related to flooding and water management issues as well as incorporation of landscape, biodiversity, and nature considerations.
- Flooding and water management - The CGV Project has been promoted one of 3 main 'test' locations being used by the Connecting the Culm Partnership to develop innovative sustainable natural solutions to develop a management plan for future flood management of the River Culm that works in harmony with the specific solutions being developed for CGV. The initial work for Connecting the Culm has focussed on technical analysis and building a catchment wide hydrological model which will now form the basis for testing of flooding and water management solutions. The flooding and hydrological modelling and work now proposed for CGV will also benefit from utilising the catchment wide flooding survey and modelling information as part of the next phase of the master planning and evidence base.
- Building with Nature - work has started on implementing the Building with Nature design and accreditation scheme for the CGV proposals as part of work around design quality, innovation and achieving one of the core objectives of a landscape and nature/biodiversity based design approach as set out in the Vision and Concept for the Garden Village.

3.0 OTHER MAJOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT WORK

3.1 Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension (Tiverton EUE)

In 2014 the Tiverton EUE Masterplan was adopted and updated in 2018 to provide a comprehensive plan for the development of the area. This has been supported by the production and adoption of the Tiverton EUE Design Guide.

On 1st February 2018, the Government announced the successful award of £8.2 million through the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bid towards the northern part of the A361 road junction. The due diligence process with Homes England over this award has now been completed and the grant fund agreement entered into with Homes England in late November 2019. Construction of Phase 2 of the A361 road junction together with the works already completed, will complete the grade separated junction and will serve the urban extension.

The Braid Park development (towards the north east of the Tiverton EUE) is now well advanced. This will see 248 houses and three gypsy and traveller pitches being developed. A Reserved Matters application for the first phase of (housing) development on the Chettiscombe Trust land (north and south of Blundell's Road) on the EUE is anticipated is early 2021.

The Tiverton EUE Area B Masterplan is well advanced. Landowner meetings and stakeholder workshops have been undertaken as part of this process. The final, Stage 2 public consultation, took place between February and April 2020. The draft masterplan was then considered at Cabinet on 3rd September 2020. Final adoption has been paused to take the opportunity to consider early findings from the Playing Pitch Strategy. These findings and how they relate to this this masterplan are currently under consideration, before masterplan finalisation and adoption.

3.2 NW Cullompton Urban Extension

Three major planning applications in relation to Phase 1 (600 houses, link road, primary school land, green infrastructure and community facilities and contributions to town centre relief road) were approved at Planning Committee in July 2019, subject to negotiation of Section 106 Agreements. Work on the Section 106 agreements has been ongoing and is now well advanced.

Two major outline planning applications for 315 houses (in total) and employment land have been received in relation to Phase 2. Phase 2 comprises 600 houses, employment land, local centre, green infrastructure and gypsy and traveller pitches. Applications for the remainder of Phase 2 are expected.

With the adoption of the Mid Devon Local Plan 2013-2033, the allocated area at NW Cullompton increased from 1100 to 1350 dwellings with additional land being brought into the allocation. The Council will seek to work with the landowners/ promoters over the masterplanning of these additional areas.

4.0 INFRASTRUCTURE AND FUNDING

4.1 Cullompton town centre relief road

Following consideration of alignment options by MDDC Cabinet and DCC Cabinet, work on the project over the past year has focussed on the requirements of the planning application including developing and finalising the design, finalising junction arrangements at either end of the scheme, developing environmental mitigation and identifying a strategy for the relocation of sports pitches and compensating land for the loss of public open space. Devon County Council undertook a further public consultation exercise between 19th November and 20th December 2019.

This planning related work culminated in the submission of an application (20/00876/MFUL) to this Council supported by technical evidence and an environmental statement. It was validated on 19th June 2020 and is in the

process of being assessed. The line of the relief road will necessitate the relocation of Cullompton Cricket Club. A planning application (20/01452/MOUT) for cricket facilities at a new site was validated on 25th September. Both planning applications are live. The applications are due to be considered together at a meeting of Planning Committee in the near future.

At this stage in the project land assembly and tendering for the contract to construct the road are still to take place. These activities await the outcome of the planning process.

4.2 Housing Infrastructure Fund

The Council has been successful with both the Housing Infrastructure Fund bids. These relate to £10m for improvements to J28 of the M5 at Cullompton (via delivery of the Cullompton town centre relief road), plus £8.2m to deliver the northern half of the A361 junction to serve the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension. Both grant fund agreements were entered into with Homes England towards the end of 2019. A report on the HIF projects and grant fund agreements was considered by Scrutiny Committee on 20th July 2020 and Audit Committee 22nd September 2020, the latter considering funding for the Cullompton scheme.

Engagement continues to take place with Homes England with monthly project review meetings and quarterly monitoring returns.

4.3 Capacity funding

The Council was awarded £150,000 of Government capacity funding to support the delivery of housing on the Culm Garden Village for the period 19/20. A further bid for 20/21 is under consideration by Homes England, the outcome of which is expected shortly. The current bid identifies a need to undertake a strategic outline business case in connection with the major upgrade to the Cullompton motorway junction at a cost of approximately £900,000.

4.4 Reopening Cullompton railway station

Working in collaboration with partners, this project seeks the re-opening of Cullompton Railway Station as part of a wider project to improve rail services in the sub region. This includes restoring rail access at Cullompton and Wellington stations and enhancing rail services along the Bristol – Exeter corridor as part of the multimodal approach to meeting the travel needs of the region.

Over the last five years the Devon and Somerset Metro partnership has overseen the development of patronage forecasting, timetabling analysis and initial engineering feasibility work. The partnership has involved participation from County, District and Town Councils, the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise partnership, Network Rail, Great Western Railway and the two local MPs. In May 2020, the partnership was successful in securing funding of up to £50,000 from the Department for Transport’s “Restoring your Railway” Ideas Fund. This feasibility funding is supporting the development of the

Strategic Outline Business Case. This work is well advanced and is due to be completed shortly.

The recently published National Infrastructure Strategy makes reference to this project and the feasibility funding which will form the basis for decisions on further development. The project is gearing up to be in an advantageous position for a potential New Station Fund application in 2021.

5.0 PLANNING: POLICY, PLANS AND MONITORING

In August 2020 the Government published a White Paper 'Planning for the Future' within which wholesale proposals for reform of the planning system were set out for consultation purposes. Whilst the outcome of that consultation is not yet known it is clear that much of the planning system will be subject to significant change in the next few years.

5.1 Local Plan Review

The Mid Devon Local Plan Review 2013 – 2033 was adopted by the Council on 29th July 2020. This follows the receipt of the Inspector's report on 26th June in which main modifications were recommended to make the plan sound and capable of being adopted by the Council.

The adoption of the Local Plan Review draws to a close 5 years of preparation and lengthy examination process. The Local Plan Review now carries full weight as part of the statutory development plan for Mid Devon, together with the Devon Minerals and Waste Plans and Neighbourhood Plans once these have been adopted and 'made', for the purpose of guiding planning applications submitted to the Council for determination and the decisions made on these. The adopted Local Plan Review confirms a 5 year supply of land for housing and will give certainty to the development industry and our communities about where development can take place and which parts of the district will be protected.

5.2 New Local Plan

Officers are now tasked with preparing a new Local Plan for Mid Devon, and proposals for an approach, programme and timetable for this will be brought before Members at the Cabinet meeting to be held in early 2021. The new Local Plan will provide a fresh opportunity to assess and plan for the future development needs of Mid Devon, including new infrastructure, and help us roll into policy for the development and use of land the most current thinking and approaches to mitigate the impacts of climate change, move towards zero carbon, raise prosperity, improve health and well-being and protect and enhance our high quality landscapes and nature areas.

5.3 Strategic Planning

On the 23rd July, East Devon District Council's Strategic Planning Committee resolved to recommend to their Council that EDDC withdraw from working on the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (known as the 'GESp') while making a

commitment to continue to work with the partner authorities. This recommendation was then agreed at their Council on 29th August.

This Council at its meeting on 26th August 2020 resolved to:

1. *Commit to prepare a revised joint strategic statutory plan;*
2. *Should Officers subsequently advise that 1. proves not to be the most appropriate option in planning terms, consider a review of other options for further strategic and cross-boundary planning matters with willing participatory authorities in the Housing Market Area;*
3. *Instruct officers to review and incorporate relevant elements of the GESP Draft Policies and Site Options consultation document and other supporting documentation and evidence that remain valid;*
4. *Jointly prepare necessary technical studies and evidence for the new strategic plan, including conducting a further call for sites process, align monitoring and share resources where there are planning and cost benefits for doing so;*
5. *Reaffirm the Council's commitment to the delivery of high quality development at Culm Garden Village as part of the Garden Communities Programme and continue to work collaboratively as a group of Councils in the garden communities programme with Homes England; and*
6. *Task Officers to prepare a further report on staff resources to prepare a revised joint strategic plan with resources to be provided equitably to the team through equalisation arrangements.*
7. *Task Officers to bring forward the preparation of the next Local Plan Review*

Since that time discussions have continued between Leaders and relevant portfolio holders/executive members on alternative options for continuing partnership working outside of GESP. Discussions have focussed on the common issues that bring the partner authorities of East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge together, in conjunction with the County Council which previously fulfilled a supporting role. These common issues are primarily that the area is a single housing and functional economic area which also operates as a large travel to work area. The wider area also faces common issues; housing affordability and the need to deliver greater numbers of homes; constraints on infrastructure and limits to the availability of funding; the need for a flexible and efficient transport system which supports prosperity and access to services; the need to respond to the climate emergency, achieve net zero carbon development and increase habitat creation; and the need to improve accessibility for urban and rural areas by widening digital connectivity. These vital issues affect the whole area and therefore can be effectively considered in a strategic, cross-boundary manner.

At the time of preparing this Portfolio Holder's report it is intended that a further report on future strategic planning working will be subject to a decision of the Cabinet (at its meeting on 3rd December 2020) to recommend to Council to support in principle the production of a joint non-statutory plan, to include joint strategy and infrastructure matters for the Greater Exeter Area in partnership with Exeter, East Devon, Teignbridge and Devon County Councils. This will be subject to agreement of details of the scope of the plan, a timetable for its production, the resources required, and governance arrangements to be agreed at a later date.

5.4 Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood plan areas have been designated in Cullompton (2014), Silverton (2014), Crediton (2014) and Tiverton (2018). Officers have provided technical support to neighbourhood planning groups through attending meetings and providing advice and guidance where requested.

All Neighbourhood Plans are at different stages of production. The most advanced is the Cullompton Neighbourhood Plan which in 2020 passed its examination and will progress to its referendum in the spring 2021, once this is permitted in light of the current restrictions on public gatherings and the need for social distancing in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Crediton Neighbourhood Plan went through a pre-submission consultation in summer 2019 and it is expected that a final draft version of the plan will be submitted to the Council in the coming months. Silverton Parish Council has produced a draft Neighbourhood Plan. However, the pre-submission consultation was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Tiverton Neighbourhood Plan group has produced a draft plan and officers have provided comments and feedback on this ahead of the formal pre-submission stage.

Willand Parish Council and Kentisbeare Parish Council have expressed interest to officers about the potential for preparation of neighbourhood plans for their areas.

5.5 Community Infrastructure Levy

The proposed Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) draft charging schedule and associated documents were submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination at the end of March 2017. The examination process is currently held in abeyance while options to progress this can be considered in light of the Government's recent consultation proposals to reform the planning system in its White Paper. These consultation proposals include a move to introduce a new system of developer contribution to replace both the CIL and S106 planning obligations with a new national Infrastructure Levy. This would result in a Mid Devon CIL having a limited lifespan and period in which CIL receipts could be collected.

The decision to progress the examination of the Mid Devon CIL will be subject to a Cabinet decision on 3rd December 2020, which if agreed would

recommend to Council that the draft CIL charging schedule is withdrawn from its examination and no longer progressed. This follows the weighing up of options to progress the CIL examination and the Council's continued ability to secure S106 planning obligations to help pay for affordable housing and infrastructure without pooling restrictions until such time as planning reforms are introduced.

5.6 Housing Enabling

The Council's housing enabling role has been moved from the Housing Service to the Planning, Economy and Regeneration Service. This has allowed the Housing Service to focus on meeting its statutory obligations to address homelessness, and provides an opportunity for the Planning, Economy and Regeneration Service to better align securing the delivery of affordable housing through the planning process with the housing needs of specific parts of the community, including affordable homes and different types and tenures, sites and pitches for Gypsies and Travellers, plots for people wishing to commission or build their own home, and also modern methods of construction.

At the time of preparing this Portfolio Holder's report resources for the housing enabling role are being put in place, including a new Housing Enabling and Policy Officer post in the Forward Planning team. The Housing Service will continue to help advise the Forward Planning team over the coming months.

5.7 Delivering custom and self-build in Mid Devon

The Government wants to enable more people to build their own home. The Council recognises the potential benefits of self-build in meeting the housing needs of Mid Devon residents. It can represent a more affordable housing option for local people, support the construction industry and give people more choice in the housing market. The Council has a legal requirement to keep a register to holds a register of individuals who seek to acquire serviced self-build plots and to give permission for serviced plots to meet demand for self-build and custom housebuilding.

Support for the Council in meeting our obligations was considered by Cabinet in August 2018. Technical support to the Council has since been provided by the Right to Build Task Force which has been funded via a Government new burdens payment. This has included a secondment of the Self Build Project Officer from Teignbridge District Council, and workshop / seminars to officers, Members and Town / Parish Councils. Officers have also received written technical advice from the Task Force. This has been used to inform the examination of the Local Plan Review and help justify the inclusion of a policy requirement to support self-build and custom dwellings on sites of 20 dwellings or more where developers will supply at least 5% of serviced dwelling plots for sale to self-builders. The Task Force has also helped the Council produce a series of guidance documents. Further written advice to the Council will be used to inform the future preparation in 2021 of a Custom and Self Build Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Following adoption of the Local Plan 2013 – 2033, a number of discussions are currently taking place on a range of applications whereby there is a policy requirement to provide a proportion of custom and self-build. Securing delivery through this policy will provide an important contribution to meeting the demand for custom and self-build across the district.

A member of the Forward Planning Team is continuing to provide technical support to the Right to Build Task Force, to assist other Local Authorities promote custom and self-build.

5.8 Mid Devon District Design Guide

Good quality design is an integral part of sustainable development. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises that design quality matters and that planning should drive up standards across all forms of development. Achieving good design is about creating places, buildings, or spaces that work well for everyone, look good, last well, and will adapt to the needs of future generations. The Government has also recently published the National Design Guide, which sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice.

The Council commissioned work on the production of a new District Design Guide in 2018. During its preparation, the project team facilitated a wide range of stakeholder engagement with local agents, architects, developers, statutory consultees, neighbourhood plan groups, town and parish councils, and Members. These sessions usefully helped shape both the methodological approach and usability of the Design Guide. The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) expands on local plan policy for design and provides detailed guidance on urban, village and rural design issues in Mid Devon. It is intended to raise design awareness and standards throughout the planning process.

The Mid Devon Design Guide SPD has now been adopted. The SPD is structured into four volumes and a pocket toolkit.

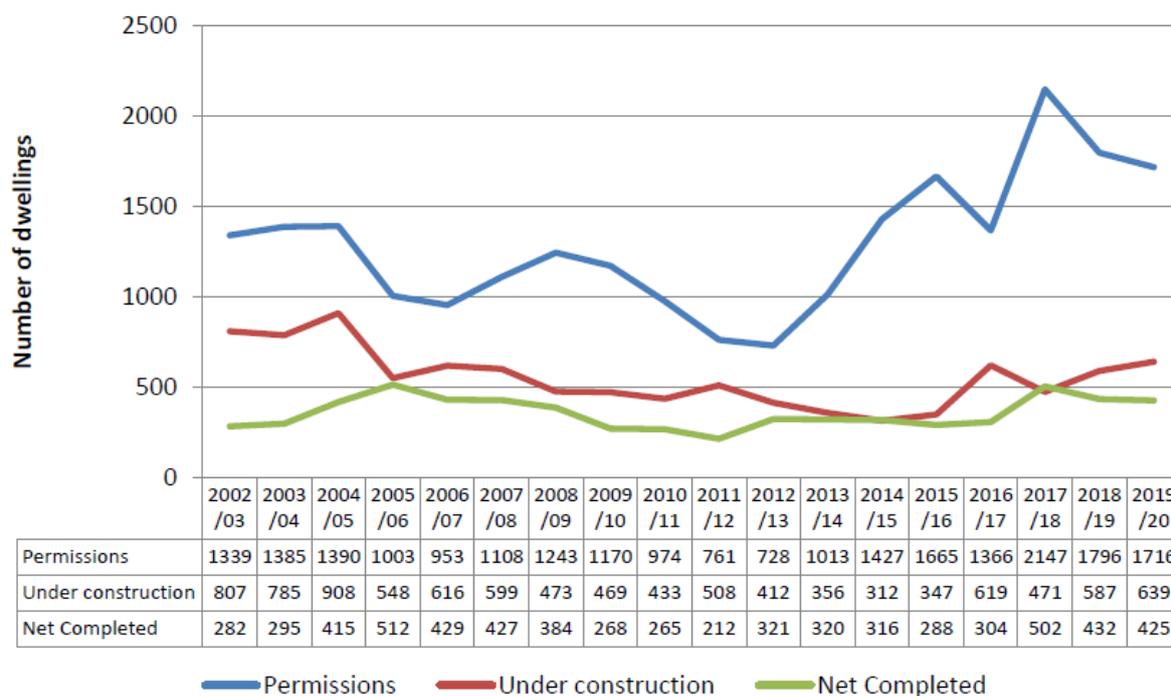
5.9 Housing Delivery Test

The Housing Delivery Test (HDT) forms the means by which the Government assesses the level of housing delivery against local requirements. It compares the total number of new homes delivered against the total number of homes required for each Council over a three-year period.

The most recently available HDT results were announced by the Government in February 2020, covering the three year period to March 2019. Mid Devon's result of 135% indicates housing delivery exceeded the number of homes required over this period and being over 85%, means that no penalties are applied and no action plan is required. The result means that in Mid Devon there is no longer 'significant under delivery' of housing and accordingly a 5% rather than the previous 20% buffer is applied to for the purposes of calculating future housing land supply.

The next set of results are expected in February 2021. Based on completion data for the 2019/20 year, it is anticipated that the results will indicate housing

delivery in Mid Devon continues to exceed current requirements. 425 homes were completed in Mid Devon in 19/20, of which 133 were affordable.



5.10 Housing land supply and monitoring

The Local Plan Inspector’s report has made clear that the Local Plan Review, incorporating the recommended Main Modifications, is “well capable of achieving a rolling five year supply of deliverable housing sites”. Following adoption of the Local Plan on 29th July 2020, the Council has a housing land supply in excess of the minimum requirement of 5 years.

Officers are currently working on an updated calculation of the housing land supply, based on the most recently available monitoring data covering the period April 2019 – March 2020. This updated calculation will take account of recent evidence relating to the deliverability of sites, ensuring that a housing land supply position can be established which is fully in accordance with the 2019 NPPF.

Officers are currently implementing a new database for monitoring housing development in the district which will provide for greater complexity of reporting and will be used for housing land supply updates, informing the Housing Delivery Test and statutory returns to the Government.

5.11 Gypsy and traveller forum and Local Government Association funded research

A Mid Devon Gypsy and Traveller Forum was set up in 2018 to improve engagement with the community, aid policy development and to better understand the needs of that community. The Council has a public sector

equalities duty (PSED) under the Equality Act 2010. This sets out that a public authority must in the exercise of its functions have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between those who share protected characteristics and persons who do not share it. The Council is also required to have a 5 year land supply of deliverable housing sites and Gypsy and Traveller Pitches, as well as developing fair and effective strategies to meet longer term needs. The establishment of the Forum assists in meeting these requirements and legal duties.

Five Forum Meetings have been held since May 2018, most recently in November this year, and a future meeting will be arranged for the spring 2021. Officers have continued to develop their understanding of the housing needs of the Gypsies and Travellers through networking with the South West Peninsula Wide Gypsy and Traveller Officers Forum, National Housing Policy Advisory Panel on Gypsy, Romany and Traveller Accommodation, and with housing and planning officers from other Councils in Devon. A further training event for officers, Members and Town and Parish Councils will be arranged later in 2021.

The Council's consultant, De Montfort University, has concluded a 9 month investigation of the challenges facing Local Authorities in seeking to include Gypsy and Traveller sites in planned urban extensions. The research is part of the IDeA Housing Advisers Programme and is the result of a successful bid made by the Council in 2018 for grant funding. The 20 page report "Negotiating the delivery of Gypsy & Traveller sites through local planning" has found no substantive evidence to support the assertions made by some developers that the inclusion of pitches in housing schemes can impact on the viability of the development. This follows efforts to engage with mortgage lenders in the UK. The report has been informed by a survey of Local Authorities and an investigation of how residential property prices may be affected by the proximity of other land uses. The report concludes that 'certainty increases viability' and points to how the well-scoped plans can decrease the risk and uncertainty felt by developers and lenders, and that flexibility and negotiation in the planning process can hasten the delivery of much needed sites. The report is now published on the Council's website.

5.12 Playing pitch strategy

The preparation of a playing pitch strategy for Mid Devon has reached an advanced stage, following the commission of consultants in early 2020. The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) involves a qualitative and quantitative assessment of pitch sports provision in Mid Devon, engagement with sports clubs and providers, and assessment of future needs. The PPS will be used to help inform the new Local Plan for Mid Devon, and the preparation of masterplans and other programmes and strategies. A draft findings and issues report is currently under review by the project steering group. The intention is to begin work on developing the final strategy document in early 2021.

5.13 New Homes Occupier Survey

Officers are finalising work to launch a survey in early 2021 of occupiers of new homes in Mid Devon. This survey will help find out more about how those new homes are benefiting residents in Mid Devon and the findings will be used to help inform the preparation of a new Local Plan.

5.14 Development Delivery Advisory Group

The Development Delivery Advisory Group met for the first time in November 2020, with the election of a Chair and Vice Chair and the consideration of draft Terms of Reference. The Group is intended to complement and procedurally mirror the established Planning Policy Advisory Group, and will focus its attention on the implementation of the Local Plan site allocations and the delivery of new homes and other development.

6.0 PLANNING – PERFORMANCE

6.1 Application determination performance.

The Government uses speed and quality of decision indicators as the main means of assessing planning application performance. These indicators with performance requirements are set our major and non-major applications as follows:

Speed:

- **Majors: More than 60% of major applications determined within 13 weeks (over 2 year period).** Mid Devon performance on this for the 2 year period to the end of September 2020 was **69%**.

The most recent national dataset for the 24 month period to the end of June 2020 places the performance for Mid Devon as 64.4%. The dataset has a median figure of 90.5%, placing Mid Devon in the 4th quartile nationally (England) over this period.

- **Non majors: More than 70% of non-major applications determined within 8 weeks (over 2 year period).** Mid Devon performance on this for the last 2 year period to the end of September 2020 was **86%**.

The most recent national dataset for the 24 month period to the end of June 2020 places the performance for Mid Devon as 86.6%. The dataset has a median figure of 90.9%, placing Mid Devon in the 3rd quartile nationally (England) over this period.

Quality:

- **Majors: for applications determined over a 2 year period, no more than 10% of ‘major’ decisions to be overturned at appeal.** The Mid Devon figure over the last 2 year period was **5.7%**.

The most recent national dataset for the 24 months to the end of March 2019 places the performance of Mid Devon as 5.2%. The dataset has a median figure of 1.4%, placing Mid Devon in the 4th quartile nationally (England) over this period.

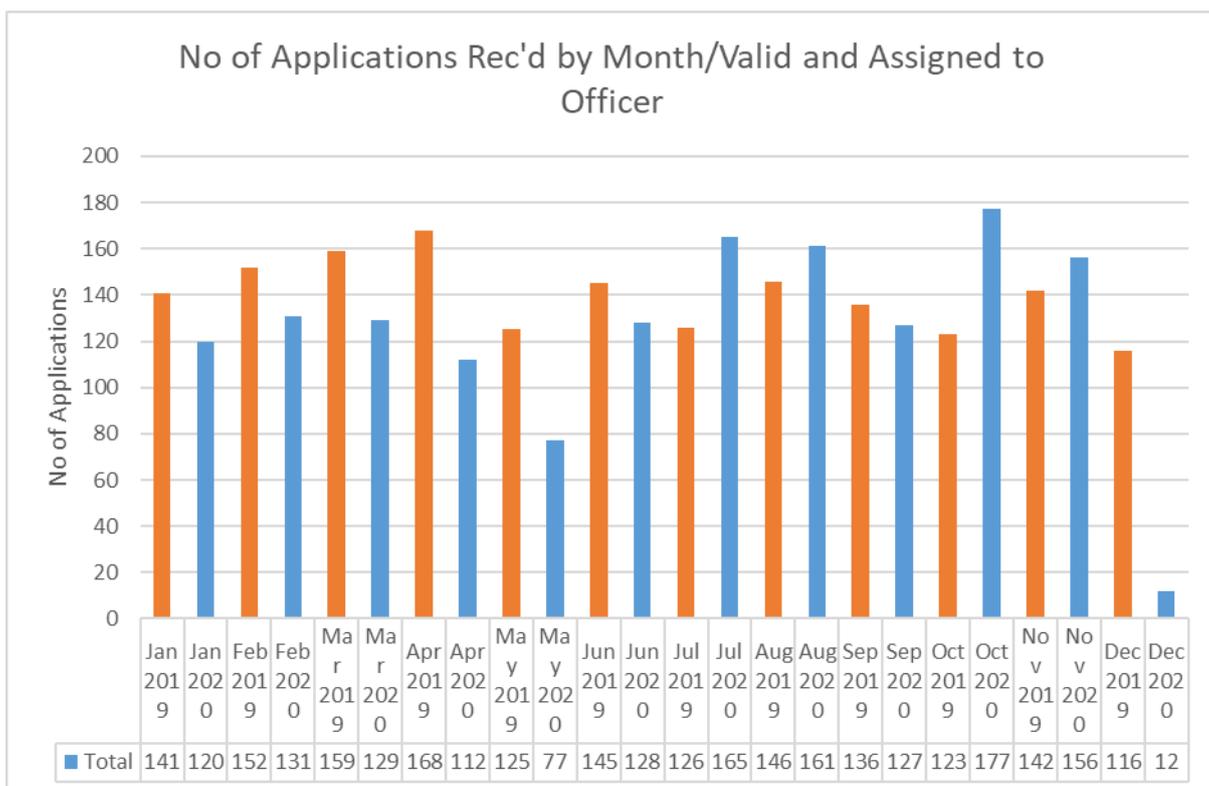
- **Non majors: This indicator of quality of decision making is measured over a 2 year assessment period: no more than 10% of 'non major' decisions to be overturned at appeal.** The Mid Devon figure over the last 2 year period was **0.43%**.

The most recent national dataset for the 24 months to the end of March 2019 places the performance of Mid Devon as 0.4%. The dataset has a median figure of 0.9%, placing Mid Devon in the 1st or top quartile nationally (England) over this period.

Application determination performance data against national and local indicators over the last few years is attached at **Appendix 2**. The latest performance results for quarter 2 of 20/21 indicates that the national planning performance indicators for the speed and quality of planning application decision making have been met and exceeded by the service, but in some areas is not performing favourably when compared with that of others nationally. This is particularly the case with major applications due to a higher percentage being overturned at appeal than other Councils and less emphasis on agreeing extensions of time towards the beginning of the 2 year assessment period which is affecting the speed of decision making performance figure.

For all applications determined within 8 or 13 weeks, the performance figures include those where there has been an agreed extension of time. This is in accordance with the methodology for reporting planning application determination set out by the Government.

The Development Management team has experienced a challenging period in 2020 with significant changes required to rapidly move to predominantly working from home and electronic means rather than paper plans. The service has been sustained although site visits were temporarily suspended and alternative methods utilised including maps, videos, photographs and the internet. This period has also seen the vacancy of an Area Team Leader post. This has been successfully recruited with the new post holder due to join the Council at the beginning of January. New applications dropped off in the first half of 2020, but have since seen some recovery, however planning fee income remains significantly below budget. The following graph shows applications received and valid by month for 2020 compared with 2019.

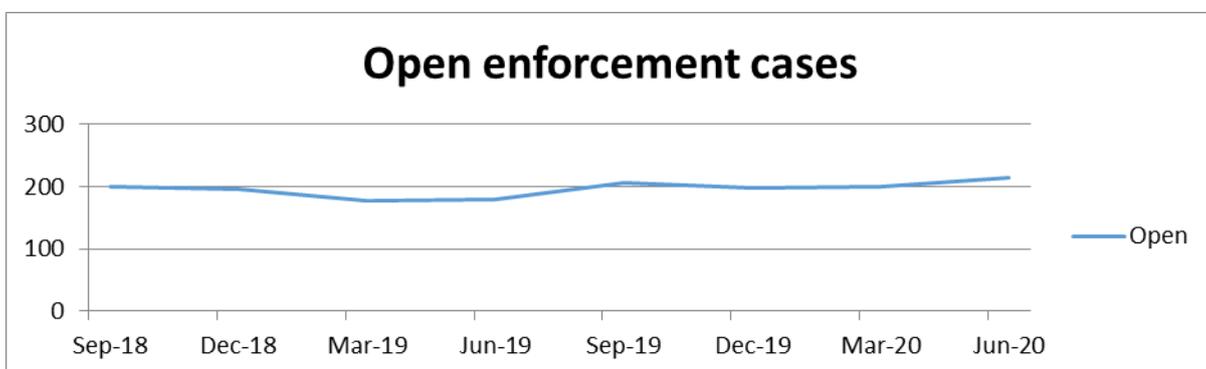
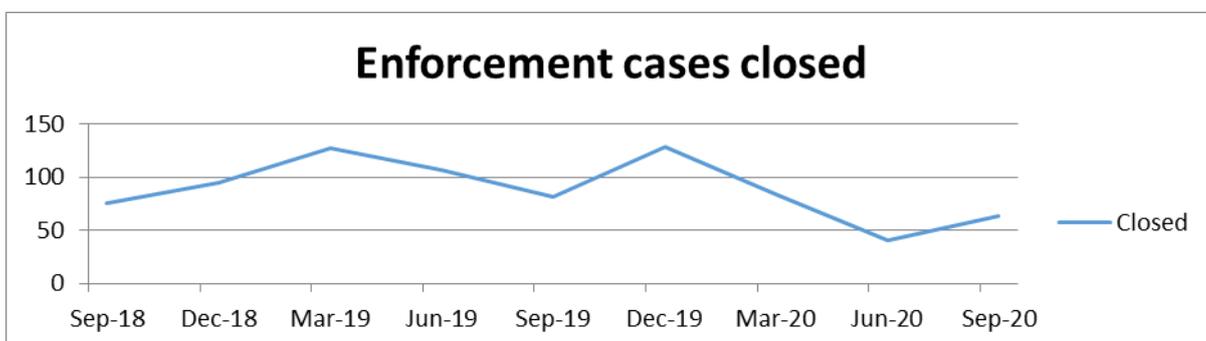
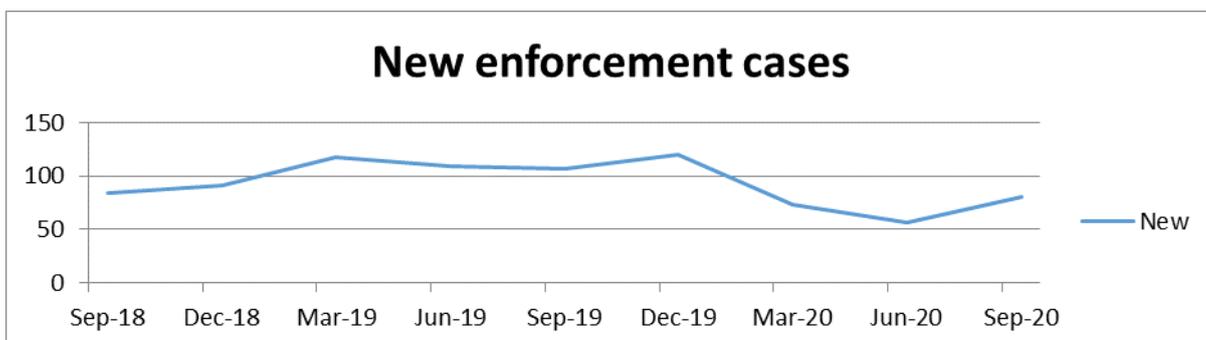


It is clear from the performance information presented that there has been an increasing number of live applications on hand over 13 weeks old without a decision. There is also a high reliance upon agreed extensions of time in application determination. These areas will need to be the focus going forward with the aim of more decisive decision making whilst ensuring quality of decision making.

6.2 Planning enforcement

The Local Enforcement Plan was agreed by Council on 21st February 2018. It sets out prioritisation criteria for compliant investigation together with performance standards. Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the enforcement of planning control at the meeting on 14th September 2020 where it was resolved to set up a working group to consider this area in more detail. Terms of reference of this working group are being established.

Activity within the enforcement part of the planning service by quarter is at **Appendix 2**. At time of writing this report there is a total of 224 ongoing live cases. The following graphs show the number of new enforcement cases received, number closed and number on hand and are measured by quarter.



6.3 S106 governance and monitoring

An audit of the management of S106 funds in February 2018 identified a number of instances where controls and procedures required improvement. Significant work has been undertaken to update the database of s106 monies, reconcile records and improve information together with the ongoing development of a new management system.

A review of governance procedures has been undertaken, addressing the allocation and spend of S106 contributions to ensure appropriate controls are in place. The governance arrangements were agreed at the meeting of Council on 28th October 2020. The first meeting of the S106 Board has now taken place.

The Council is required to publish S106 records of funds received and spend for 19/20 by 31st December 2020 as part of a wider Local Infrastructure Statement and annually thereafter. A report is due to be considered at the December meeting of Cabinet identifying infrastructure towards which

developer contributions will be collected. The next few months will see the roll out of S106 fund information to Members, Town and Parish Councils.

7.0 BUILDING CONTROL

Building Control Partnership

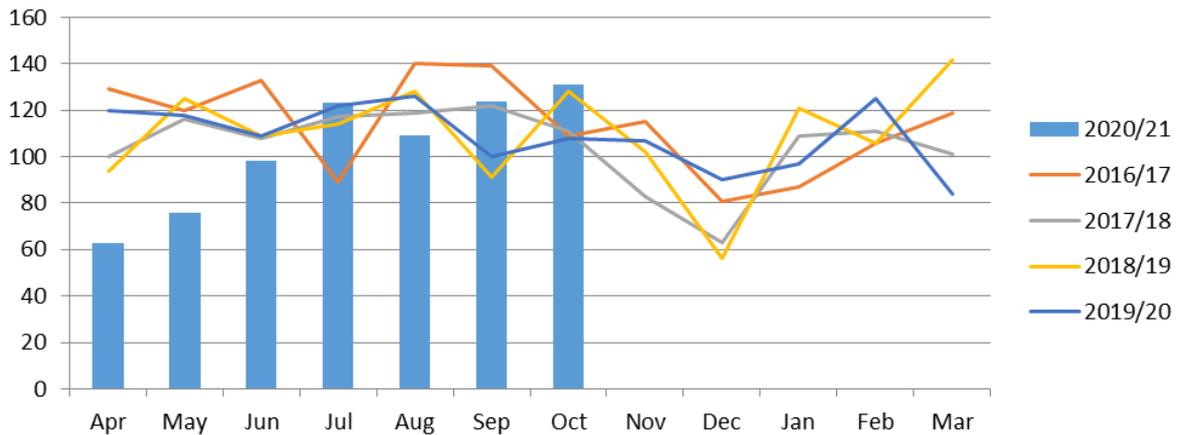
Mid Devon's Building Control service operates in partnership with North Devon Council as NMD Building Control. The partnership service has been operational since April 2017 and under normal conditions is delivered from offices in South Molton. A Joint Committee oversees the delivery of the functions of the partnership service. 2020 has seen a continued consolidation realising the benefits of the partnership.

The Building Control service has exceeded the performance target relating to the assessment of full plans applications. Response times for plan checking have improved throughout each of the year and are now consistently above target.

Key performance indicator	Year	2018/19				2019/20	
	Target	Qu 1	Qu 2	Qu 3	Qu 4	Qu 1	Qu2
Building Regulation Full Plan applications determined in 2 months	95%	99%	96%	100%	100%	98%	99%
Building Regulation Applications examined within 3 weeks	95%	84%	90%	98%	99%	99%	100%

The graph below indicates the number of applications received per month. Application numbers have recovered strongly from the substantial drop in the first quarter of this financial year, culminating in the highest number of applications in October in the last five years. However, it is assumed that the period of national restrictions will have some impact although not as severe as the first when activity was effectively closed down. Overall income is below that budgeted for the year. However, there was a strong recovery in September and October.

Applications per month



This year has seen a rapid move to home working with a continuation of service through the periods of national restrictions through remote inspections carried out using video conferencing combined with telephone interviews and photographs during a three-week period during which on-site inspections were suspended.

Changes resulting from the Dame Judith Hackitt led review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety have continued in 2020. The Building Safety Bill is the framework and enabling legislation for putting in place new and enhanced regulatory regimes for building safety and construction products, and ensure residents have a stronger voice. It implements the recommendations of the Building Safety programme which was set up to advise the government on the measures needed to ensure building safety following the Grenfell Tower Fire on 14 June 2017 and in particular the recommendations of the Hackitt Review. A new Building Safety Regulator is being established to oversee the safety and performance of all buildings and actively enforce a more stringent regulatory regime for qualifying buildings.

There is now a need to validate the expertise of surveyors throughout their career. Five Surveyors passed the LABC competence assessment exam qualifying them as Level 6 Fire Specialists, which is the highest possible level of validation. This means that they will receive a licence to practice on the most complex types of development including high rise residential developments. Validation forms an integral part of the Partnership's quality assurance system that is accredited to ISO 9001, ensuring the requirements of the competency framework are met. Building Control providers will also be required to register, follow procedures and meet defined standards.