

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Meeting

Date: 17 June 2025

Outside Organisation Updates from the Councils appointed representatives:

Brief:

The Council's representatives are invited to report on any meetings of the appointed outside organisation, the role the organisation(s) they represent plays in promoting and aligning with the Council's priorities, policies and strategies, their impact and results, and advising on partnership discussions which are open and in the public domain. Feedback is scheduled across a full year cycle once per annum for most organisations and twice where meetings are more frequent (greater than 5)

Update from: Cllr Palethorpe

Outside Organisation/Body: Devon Communities Together – Annual Impact and Strategic Importance

Purpose of the Organisation:	<p>Introduction Report highlights the work and impact of Devon Communities Together (DCT) over the period April 2024 to March 2025, with a focus on its value to communities across Devon and the relevance of its activities to Teignbridge District Council's strategic objectives. DCT is an independent Devon-based charity that supports and empowers communities – particularly rural and coastal – to tackle issues of isolation, inequality, and access to services.</p> <p>Strategic Scope and Community Support DCT's mission is to help build strong, inclusive, and sustainable communities. Over the past year, its work has encompassed a wide range of priorities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport and accessibility • Skills and employment • Affordable rural housing • Health and wellbeing • Support for community buildings, groups, and businesses <p>DCT has provided advice, training, and access to funding that has enabled a wide variety of local projects to flourish.</p>
Attendance requirements/ meetings attended:	<p>.</p> <p>As required and programmed by Trustees</p>
Feedback:	<p>Community-Led Business and Facilities</p> <p>Examples of supported initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A volunteer-run cycle repair and refurbishment enterprise in Totnes.

- The Gittisham Community Kitchen, which has become a valued local hub.
- A network of community shops created or supported across the county.

These initiatives highlight the role DCT plays in enabling volunteer-led, locally driven solutions to community challenges.

Support for Local Plans and Engagement

DCT has also made a significant contribution to local democratic engagement. Notably, it was a partner in the Tavistock Town Council Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group, where it helped design and market the town-wide community survey and assisted in leaflet distribution and engagement strategies.

This experience may be particularly relevant in Teignbridge, where several parishes still lack adopted neighbourhood plans.

DCT's expertise could be instrumental in supporting those communities to develop them.

Value and Economic Impact

The total measurable value of DCT's work across Devon in the 2024–25 period has been estimated at over £2 million. This includes both direct funding and the broader value of community-led and volunteer-supported delivery enabled through their involvement.

Health and Wellbeing Programmes

DCT has been commissioned to deliver several important health-related initiatives, including:

- Cancer outreach programmes funded by the South West Cancer Alliance, targeting rural and coastal communities. These initiatives have reached over 4,300 residents, raised awareness and encouraging early screening for breast, bowel, and cervical cancers.
- Work with Devon County Council to identify barriers to accessing drug and alcohol treatment in rural areas.
- Exploring the use of village halls and community buildings as rural health hubs.

These programmes help address known health inequalities in rural Devon, particularly where geographic isolation limits access to regular health services.

Transport and Disability Inclusion

Transport access remains a significant barrier across Devon. People with disabilities in rural areas take up to 40% fewer trips than non-disabled people due to limited or inaccessible services. In response:

- DCT has developed a “Travelling with Confidence in Devon” project, co-designed with people with lived experience of disability.
- They are now working with Stagecoach, City Bus, and Plymouth City Council and others to deliver disability awareness training to operators, aiming to improve access and confidence in public transport.

Environmental and Community Nature Projects

As a partner on the Devon Local Nature Partnership Board, DCT has contributed significantly to local nature recovery strategies. Through the Wild About Devon community grants programme:

- 33 community-led environmental projects were supported.
- 8,000 m² of habitat were created or restored.
- Over 700 people engaged directly through events, volunteering, and activities.

This grassroots engagement has promoted ecological awareness and stewardship in communities across Devon and Torbay.

Rural Housing Enabling

DCT continues to play a central role in addressing the lack of affordable rural housing. As a member of the Devon Community Housing Hub, DCT’s Rural Housing Enablers:

- Conduct Housing Needs Surveys to assess local demand (14 completed in 2024–25).
- Support communities in identifying sites and working with housing associations and developers.
- Assisted 21 communities in progressing plans for new affordable homes.

This work is vital to ensuring local people can remain in their communities and supports balanced, sustainable rural development.

Village Halls and Community Infrastructure

DCT recently published a Devon Village Halls Asset Map, identifying over 340 village halls (around 80% of all halls in the county). This searchable database:

- Helps users find and hire venues locally.
- Provides valuable data for understanding infrastructure gaps and targeting support.

Village halls are often the only community spaces available in rural areas, and DCT’s work in this area is essential to maintaining local cohesion.

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

	<p>DCT also supports the broader Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 organisations were supported in funding applications. • 4 new organisations were helped to establish. • 6 organisations developed robust business plans with DCT's support. <p>Their work has been especially focused in East Devon but holds significant relevance to the Teignbridge area as well.</p>
Examples of where the brief above has been followed:	DCT produce annual report identifying impacts and services provided
Additional information relevant to Overview & Scrutiny including the value that TDC brings to this organisation and/or why this organisation needs TDC:	<p>Conclusion</p> <p>Devon Communities Together continues to be a vital asset to Devon's voluntary and community infrastructure, particularly in rural and coastal areas. The charity's practical, place-based approach addresses many of the challenges currently faced by both residents and service providers – including transport, housing, access to healthcare, climate resilience, and cost-of-living pressures. Finally, I would like to acknowledge and commend the work of Devon Communities Together and its Chief Executive, Norah Corkery, her team, trustees, and volunteers for the excellent contribution they make to living and working in Devon.</p> <p>I would also encourage Councillors and officers to actively engage with DCT when developing or reviewing local strategies involving community engagement, neighbourhood planning, rural housing, or voluntary sector support and especially when seeking to identify gaps in neighbourhood planning and community infrastructure across Teignbridge.</p>