

District Councillor Chris Wheatley – report for Merton Parish Council on Monday
10th November 2025

External Overview and Scrutiny Committee

We received a presentation from the Chief Executive Beki Sharples of TTVS (Taw and Torridge Voluntary Services) who are committed to providing free services to those in need. This included a homelessness pilot run this year which provided a drop-in service for the homeless and statistics were shared with Public Health. TTVS provided us with Hidden Stars which provides support for carers. Other work is with pensioners, community development and befriending services, memory cafe peer mentoring for those people recovering from addiction and cancer awareness/smoking. This valued work of inclusion continues to provide a huge cost benefit with over £3 million in unclaimed benefit brought back into the community. Members of the Committee noted and reflected upon TTVS request for core funding particularly the impact of LGR (Local Government Reorganisation) was put to members and it was explained that without further financial support, TTVS would need to close by June 2026. TTVS requested for funding was put to members for stability of £45,000 till September 2026 and an increase of TDC annual investment from £16,900 to £50,000 to sustain core services. The issues raised by TTVS would be taken up with the Officer.

Members of the Committee recognised the excellent work TTVS provides for the community. I know many councillors including myself support TTVS and are keen to keep it financially afloat. **Full Council Meeting**

A motion regarding TTVS was raised by Cllr Thomas regarding financial support. It was agreed that a report from TDC regarding full options would be provided for financial support in the immediate term and beyond into 2026 at our next Full Council Meeting.

We also received Reports :-

External Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report 2024/2025 from Cllr Thomas

Internal Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report 2024/2025 from Cllr Hodgson

Annual Report from Chief Executive Steve Hearse

Beacon Solar Project proposed around the vicinity of Holsworthy developed by Galileo Empower (GE) covering 2,700 acres presented by Head of Planning Helen Smith

Licensing Committee

TAXI Policy Review

We were presented with a report from the Lead licensing Officer regarding council licensing policy for Taxis and Private Hire Licences. After discussions it was agreed out of the three options(A, B and C) that the level of fare increases the committee voted for Option B which entails a flag fare (first 3/4 of a mile increase to £4.50 and then £3.30 per mile thereafter and to amend the nighttime rate to commence at 10pm instead of 11pm. The above amended fares to commence provided no objections and advertised for a period of not less than 14 days under s. 65(2) of the Local Government Provisions Act 1976 and introduced on 1st November 2025.

TDC - Local Government Reorganisation

Still very much ongoing and undecided is where we are at with Angela Rayner mp having resigned from government. We are waiting to see what is going to happen regarding LGR from government as to where we stand! The intention by government is structure of local councils is changed to replace the existing two-tier system of county and district with more unitary councils. So far, the favoured proposal is the 4-5-1 plan. The deadline for submission of final LGR proposals is November 28th, 2025. The final decision as to which proposal is adopted is with the government.

Taw and Torridge River Champions - Are you worried about the state of the Water?

Having joined this group, we are working together with the Biosphere Community Project, West Country Rivers West, for those people attending at Chigwell Street undertook a successful first Meeting recently for participants to become a new group of citizen scientists. The newly formed group learnt about how to spot pollution, learn about the water environment, take action to improve our rivers and be part of the wider catchment community. Within our ward of Shebbear and Langtree we have three potential areas for river monitoring along the Torridge in particular Dipper Mill / Shebbear, Sheepwash and Taddiport. Next meeting is on Saturday 10am 6th December at 13 Chingswell Street in Bideford. Having undertaken e-coli testing myself 2 years ago in Taddiport there is a need for further testing to be carried out on a regular basis!

Merton Recycling complaint

Thank you, Keith, for your photos regarding evidence of waste in our hedgerows and along lanes. Cheryl and I are aware of this issue. We are awaiting results from our waste and recycling manager ref the investigation reviewing CCTV and recycle vehicle crew procedures. Newton St Petroc and Petrockstowe both have experienced similar regular recycling waste issues.

