



## **Finance and General Purpose Committee Report 2025/2026**

Prepared by: Cllr Trevor Huggins

For the past year, the Finance and General Purposes committee has overseen both a continued investment in services for our town and a strengthening of the Council's financial position. The latter will be particularly important for the future, as we prepare for the impact in Devon of the so-called Local Government Reorganisation – a phrase we will all be hearing ever more often in the years ahead.

For the time being, we continue to carry out a number of activities that would previously have been handled by other statutory bodies, such as North Devon Council or Devon County Council. Street cleaning and clearing overgrown walkways are typical examples where the Council's Facilities and Maintenance team has stepped in to solve a problem, often liaising with voluntary groups.

In a similar way, as local police resources continue to be stretched, the Council has helped to fund the presence of Street Marshals in our town. All of us are aware that Ilfracombe has its fair share of the street drinking and anti-social behaviour faced by many of Britain's seaside resorts today. Crucially, our decision to fund the marshals was backed by a public consultation, where we asked you - the people of Ilfracombe - if you were in favour of their patrols of the High Street and seafront areas. Overwhelmingly, your answer was 'yes.'

As in previous years, the Council has continued to support charities and community groups in the town through its grants system. These include the likes of Combe Christmas, Sea Ilfracombe, the Carnival, and Ilfracombe in Bloom, along with Belle's Place, Citizens' Advice and Age Concern. All of them, in their different ways, bring a real benefit to the town and we are glad to be able to help them.

Closer to home, we are also investing in Information Technology to support the work of our Council Officers. Ageing laptops are being



replaced, and the introduction of Artificial Intelligence tools will make staff resources even more productive. At the same time, we also need to look after the Council's physical assets, our bricks and mortar. The past year has inevitably required maintenance and expenditure on both the Ilfracombe Centre and The Lantern to keep them up to standard.

However, by far the most significant financial decision taken last year was the purchase of the High Street car park, courtesy of an initial one-year loan. As with every purchase, the Council is totally focused on the cost and value for money. The one-year loan we secured came at a significantly lower interest rate than that offered by the government's Public Works Loan Board over 50 years. In practice, this meant a saving of some £20,000 for the year. Moving forward, your committee is monitoring both long-term and short-term interest rates, with a view to securing a more affordable long-term loan when the time is right. However, as you know, interest rates are determined by national and international events that are far beyond our control.

For now, we are pleased to report that the High Street Car Park is paying its way. That said, predicting the future is a hazardous business. We have suffered a sudden loss of income from the unexpected closure of The Lantern nursery, along with a sharp fall in the revenue from the Primary Care Network following a contract renegotiation with the local NHS authority. On the other side of the balance sheet, a reorganisation of our Facilities and Maintenance team and unexpected staff turnover led to savings for the financial year. Added to which, the sunny weather last summer made it a good year for tourism – and a bumper one for the Council's car park at Ropery Road. Overall, 2025-26 was a positive year in budgetary terms and will enable the Council to strengthen its reserves and guarantee future investment in assets and services for our town.

For the year ahead, you will already have received your Council Tax bill and will have seen the increase of £1.20 a month in your precept payment to Ilfracombe Town Council for a Band D property. Over a year, the precept total for Band D homes will be £151.09, a rise of 10.6%. This reflects the expected increases in the Council's running



costs – such as business rates, gas and electricity, and building maintenance – and the replacement of staff who left last year. As ever, this committee will be working to ensure that your money is spent very carefully and in the best interests of our town.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the members of the committee and council officers for all their work over the past year.