

## Report to STC October 2024

Cllr. Hilary Frank



### 1. Adult Skills (previously called Adult Education)

Cornwall Council's Cabinet approved the Level 2 Devolution Deal with central government in November 2023. It includes the devolution of the Adult Education Budget (now called the Adult Skills Fund) from the academic year 2025/26, with an anticipated value of £10.31m per year. In taking receipt of the Adult Skills Fund and the Free Courses for Jobs funding, Cornwall Council will become the Commissioner of learning and career development for adults in Cornwall aged 19+.

At a meeting of the Economic Growth and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 1<sup>st</sup> October, councillors reviewed the proposed Adult Skills Fund Commissioning Plan, which is the blueprint to ensure Cornwall Council is ready to commission learning delivery from 1<sup>st</sup> August next year.

The improved flexibilities and amendments to national rules as described in the Commissioning Plan include:

- allowing more residents to benefit from fully funded learning by increasing the learner earnings threshold to £26,009. Nationally, its £25,000.
- fully funding all learners for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Currently, learners must either earn below the national earnings threshold of £25,000 or be unemployed, otherwise they are co-funded.

It was encouraging to hear Stacey Sleeman, Head of Skills at Cornwall Council, make specific reference to working with Plymouth City Council as they are acutely aware of the high number of Saltash residents crossing over to Plymouth for their studies.

### 2. Motion on the production of Education Health and Care Plans

When a child needs more support than a school, college, or nursery can provide from their own budget or staffing, they may require an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Local authorities like Cornwall Council have a legal duty to produce an EHCP within 20 weeks of a request, but demand has surged in recent years, driven in part by developmental delays linked to the pandemic. In 2018, Cornwall processed 477 requests; by 2023, this number had risen to 1,173. As a result, Cornwall is struggling to meet deadlines, and last year just 1.6% of EHCP requests were processed within the 20-week deadline.

This issue has been raised with me by many Saltash residents, so I've spoken with professionals involved in producing EHCPs at Cornwall Council. I've learned that significant time and expertise have been dedicated to identifying improvements, but there are deeper systemic issues that require national reform and proper funding. This is why I proposed a motion at the recent Full Council meeting of Cornwall Council, calling for government and MPs to tackle the issues and highlighting that Cornwall Council stands ready to support and shape efforts going forward. I'm pleased the motion gained cross-party backing and was passed unanimously.

The motion was not just about policy; it was also about supporting the dedicated, compassionate staff at Cornwall Council who work tirelessly under immense pressure in a system that is failing both them and the families they are trying to support.

One key issue is the lack of adequate funding. For example, in 2014, the upper age limit for an EHCP was raised from 18 to 25, but no additional funding was provided to help local authorities manage the increased demand. The cost of appeals is another concern. Last year, over 13,000 appeals were made against EHCP decisions in England, costing local authorities £60 million, and causing stress and uncertainty for vulnerable young people and their families.

This problem is national, but Cornwall faces unique challenges due to a disproportionately high increase in requests for assessment and an unfair funding formula. Data suggests that if Cornwall received the same per-pupil funding as other authorities, we wouldn't be facing our current deficit.

Ultimately, however, the core issue is a broken system. A report from the Local Government Association earlier this year highlighted that the current system "perpetuates tension, creates adversity, and sets everyone up to fail". It called for national reform.

I'm pleased to say that I've been contacted by several MPs regarding my motion, including Andrew George, Jayne Kirkham, and Ben Maguire, and I look forward to collaborating with them as well as with Saltash families and professionals so that together we can build a future where no family is left waiting in the shadows.

### 3. Surveys currently open on Cornwall Council's Let's Talk website:



**Housing Assistance Policy**

Seeking feedback on a single Housing Assistance Policy that will set out how Cornwall Council and its partners can help residents to repair, improve or adapt their home to help reduce the health impacts of a poor home environment.

Closes at 23:59 on 10<sup>th</sup> November



**Leisure Framework**

Seeking feedback on plans to provide accessible and quality leisure provision for the future.

Cornwall Council's current position is that there is no additional budget set aside for Leisure within the Council's 4-year, medium-term financial plan. This Framework sets out how external funding, prioritised investment and allocated resources could be targeted.

Closes on 23<sup>rd</sup> October



**Tamar Valley  
National Landscape**

Seeking feedback on the draft Tamar Valley National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030.

Closes on 23<sup>rd</sup> October