

## December 2021 Report from Cllr Marcus Hartnell – Devon County Council

### **Covid**

Confirmed cases continue to rise in Devon with the main increases in North Devon and Torridge. The highest figures remain with the 10-16 age group with young people, largely asymptomatic, passing on to parents/carers with the 40-50 age group the second highest. The higher case rates can in part be explained by the fact that Devon has previously had fewer positive cases compared to other areas, and therefore has less infection-induced immunity. Another more obvious reason is that testing in Devon is very good – roughly around 31 per cent higher in Devon compared to the England average – and the more you test, the more you identify positive cases.

Hospital admissions are also rising although at a much lower rate of rise – even so, presently there are 168 patients in our four hospitals with Covid, up from 111 early November. Deaths remain relatively low and flatlining over the past few weeks now.

**Vaccinations** – 94% of Devon’s population have had at least one dose.

Booster or 3<sup>rd</sup> dose –

- age 80+ - 81% jabbed
- 75-79 – 88%
- 70-74 – 71%
- 65-69 – 50%
- 60-64 – 31%
- 55-59 – 25%
- 50-55 – 21%

The good news is that demand and uptake of the booster vaccination in Devon is very high.

### **Household Support Fund**

Allocated from the Department for Work and Pensions to each upper tier local authority in England. The notional fund for the DCC administrative area equates to £5,064,876.

The fund is for households facing financial hardship this winter, helping them to cover the cost of food, energy and water bills and/or any related essential costs. At least 50% of the fund must be used to support households with children.

The fund is being allocated across the county through various gateways such as (not exclusively) CAB – Energy Relief Scheme; Devon Food Network; Early Help Locality Teams: Action for Children Centres; Healthy Start Food Boxes and Homeless Support Groups, with £880,000 going to District Councils to provide help and support to those who are struggling financially.

## **Climate Change**

**Devon Climate Emergency** - A consortium of the local authorities involved in the Devon Climate Emergency partnership were successful in their funding bid to the South West Energy Hub to deliver nine events across Devon during the COP26 fortnight (which was the first two weeks of November 2021). A total of £18,360 was awarded and was matched by £28,000 of funding from the local authorities. Most of the events were community led in partnership with local authorities. Feedback was that these were very well received.

**DCC Carbon Offsetting** – In order to achieve its net zero carbon target by 2030, DCC has committed to carbon offsetting for its residual emissions. The approach agreed through the DCC Carbon Reduction Plan was a ramped approach to this carbon offsetting, to cover 5% of residual emissions in Year 1 (19/20) of the Plan, rising up to 100% by 2030. Initially this was planned to be achieved through the purchase of Woodland Carbon Credits; but by Year 3 (21/22) it was proposed to use land purchase and woodland creation as the offsetting mechanism (i.e. multiple environmental / economic benefits, with DCC investing in an asset). In practice, both the purchase of Woodland Carbon Credits and the acquisition of land for woodland establishment have proved to be far more problematic (and expensive) than originally anticipated. Despite this, we achieved our first success in land acquisition recently through the purchase of 28 acres between Okehampton and Exbourne.

## **Retrofitting our estate**

Recently approved at cabinet a £3.3 million scheme that will cut carbon emissions and reduce energy use on our buildings in Exeter, Barnstaple, Tavistock and Honiton.

Insulation will be improved and solar panels and air source heat pumps will be installed along with mechanical ventilation that recovers heat and LED lighting.

Locations;

- Great Moor House in Exeter,
- Taw View in Barnstaple,
- Abbey Rise in Tavistock
- St Michael's in Honiton.
- Lucombe House at County Hall
- further five buildings are being retro-fitted using a separate, £2 million grant and solar panels were being installed on a number of the county's salt depots.

Work will start this month and be completed in 2022

## **Improvements to the Pothole Repair Process**

The Network Response Team have just gone live on a new process for Highway Safety Inspections. This change is the culmination of approximately 18 months work and will provide a platform for improvements in both efficiency and quality of repairs. By investing

more time in the data collected by the inspectors, the repair gangs will be better informed on the scope and scale of work they will be required to carry out. All repair gangs will be re-briefed on the expected quality standards and an improved auditing process will be implemented to address concerns with workmanship.

The team are moving on to look at improving the automated responses that are sent to the public once they have logged an enquiry through the 'report-a-problem' website. The aim of this work will be to help manage the expectations of the public.

### **Local Highways Issues**

Unfortunately, I've not been out and about with the Neighbourhood Highway Officer during November as there have been several covid scares that have meant it wasn't advisable. I've been aware of many reported concerns regarding the flooding on 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> October and these are being dealt with. In particular, lower Queen Street in Seaton is scheduled for drainage works on 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> December followed by a temporary surface to make it safe until a proper scheme can be programmed in to tarmac the whole length, replacing the cobbles which have been an ongoing issue.

I hope to get out with our NHO in January.

### **Contact**

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