

County Councillor update June 2020

Dear councillors,

Please find my latest update. I have included some reports from DCC Cabinet members (below).

Headlines are that Devon County Council highways officers will be focusing their attentions on towns with the biggest populations. Highway officers are aware that Tavistock Town Council and the BID are working together on plans to prepare the town for increased usage. Thanks to Janna Sanders and to the Town Council.

Despite being in lockdown because of family health vulnerabilities, I, like most councillors have seen caseloads increase plus updates from Government and Devon County Council, West Devon Borough mean reading is taking a major part of my life! Virtual meetings which were slightly “wobbly” at first have now become second nature. I would hope that in the future main Council meetings will see assemblies of local councillors, officers and members of the Public, being able to socialise and network, however I can’t see the sense in not meeting virtually for smaller meetings, task groups and catch ups.

The Public should be assured that councillors have embraced the digital way. Some County Councillors have over 20 Parish councils to attend. (I have Gulworthy and Tavistock) not having to use a vehicle to travel many miles each evening is safer, cleaner and lower carbon.

I will add that DCC continues to work to improve broadband throughout Devon. We are dependent on the internet.

Councils have worked well together, communities and armies of volunteers throughout Devon have led the way in supporting the most vulnerable and isolated residents. This is testament to the ingenuity, practical hard graft and imagination of residents. It highlights to me that communities can lead the way with less government and focused support from local councils!

West Devon Borough Council has been a leading light in directing grants and information to local businesses. Officers in revenues and benefits worked around the clock, all days, making sure that help was given as swiftly as possible.

The Covid 19 has brought out some good changes which we would be foolish to ignore.

Some updates from me: **In General, / CV19**

The number of new people reported to have Coronavirus is now reducing. As is the number of deaths daily. The number Devon Care homes effected is now the lowest in the South West with the South West. Gloucestershire to Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly the lowest region in the country.

The County Council has been given an extra £36.7 million to fight Covic-19 but have already spent well over £42million so far.

The 8 District Councils have received just under £8million between them.

Officers have calculated that the Devon Team of Devon County Council and 8 District Councils will need at least another £85million before this is finished.

Because the South West, particularly the 4 Counties of Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, and Dorset have not had the infection rates of the rest of the country there is still a fear that another spike of cases could occur after the tourist season starts. Late Summer early Autumn.

Car sales and shops are due to open soon.

It is thought that Self Catering accommodation will open next, but Hotels, Pubs, Restaurants, and Clubs may be somewhat later.

Devon is now one of 11 Beacon Authorities in England and have been asked to lead on the new Test, Track and Contain policy to control the spread of Coronavirus.

DCC will be working with Plymouth, Torbay and Cornwall and John Hart leader of Devon County Council and Phil Norrey the Devon County Chief Executive will be serving on the national committees being coordinated by Government.

The Government has announced £250million for Cycleways. Yet we do not know just how much will come to Devon but will be looking to The County is looking to improve town centres to make cycling safer. The latest update on this is that this money is likely to be going to major Cities for Town centre work.

Govt' announced the allocation of the Pothole and Challenge fund, Devon has the largest Road network of any local authority in the country and the allocation is for £28.8million. Substantially higher than any other County.

Devon has allocated £1million divided between the 8 District Councils on electorate to be able to give support to people who find they have no money and no access to money before things like Universal credit comes through.

I have been working long days with many other councillors and members of the public. This is likely to last much longer.

Stay safe everyone.

Kind regards

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Manhole covers

Some very noisy ones in Tavistock which are monitored by highway officers. Officers have reported to the utility companies to sort them out, so they aren't so annoying. Some have been sorted but as we know there are others which need attention.

Street Lighting

Devon County Council is going to have 3000 new lanterns and Tavistock and nearby areas will see 1000. They will be changed from 90 Watt to 24 Watt. They will be more white light than orange and I am advised that if residents find them too bright shields may be added. Streetlamps from the Library to the Conservation Area will see 12 being replaced with LED. The lamps will be in keeping with the Victorian design. Lights will be not be on all night which is in line with the Dark Skies ambition, Climate Emergency and Energy Saving.

I have always worked hard in trying to improve Tavistock Town as it is the only World Heritage town in Devon. As you know I led on reducing the street signage a few years ago which saw over 100 road signs being culled from Bedford square and environs. I would like to thank Mr. Les Pym who is the Senior Lighting Engineer who has supported my quest in making Tavistock more attractive. I hope you will share my delight in being successful in securing these lights for our town.

Update from Cabinet member for highways:

As you are aware over the past weeks the team have been returning to the full range of enforcement (including limited waiting, P&D, and residents parking) across communities to address concerns raised by elected Members, Police and residents. During that period, we have received over 100 requests for enforcement and needed to return to most of our key market and coastal communities.

Following release of new government guidance, [the 15th of June](#) appears to be a significant milestone in the recovery period as all retail is being permitted to reopen (where appropriate measures can be put in place). In order to support communities and manage increased

traffic, it is proposed that the service will return to enforcement in all communities in the coming weeks.

Therefore, from today (Monday 8th June), our team will be developing new beats to ensure support is provided to all communities across Devon. Our support to health and care workers, along with those needing to self-isolate though this period, will continue.

Staff will continue to be deployed in vehicles wherever possible but walked beats will be reinstated. Staff will continue to follow social distancing rules and guidance on hand hygiene. Our appeals team will continue to consider appeals relating to issues around the pandemic.

The team have recently rolled out an educational sticker campaign promoting good hygiene and social distancing when using P&D machines, along with encouragement to utilise cashless “pay by phone” wherever possible.

Public Health, Transportation, Communities and Environment

COVID-19 Prompt Action Fund. Cabinet member update

The fund was launched at the very start of the lockdown 24th March as a grant of less than £500 for constituted and not-for-private-profit voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector groups and organisations, town and parish councils, charities, or a combination of such groups working together.

After the first 50 or so applications it became obvious that, in some cases, £500 was not nearly enough to cover costs such as providing ready meals, transportation and a myriad of other services provided so a further grant fund was added to a maximum of £5,000.

To date some 370 separate applications have been received of which some 340 have been processed (some were clearly nothing to do with the present pandemic and the grants were seen to prop up ordinary activities). Some £330,000 has been distributed so far against an original budget of £480,000.

Public Health - ‘Shielded’ Residents

Starting from around 19,000 vulnerable residents, the count is now about 34,000.

Transportation:

Friday 5th June will be the last day that National Bus Pass Holders will be able to use passes before 0930. Transport providers need capacity for workers and commuters especially with social distancing reducing capacity on buses by more than 50%.

At present services are operating at a reduced level of around 50% (although this does vary across the County and are being additionally supported by two parallel CBSSG (COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant) funds, one paid direct to operators and one via local authorities for supported services – both expire 8th June 2020. A new phase of CBSSG will be paid direct to operators. Stagecoach has indicated that they will aim for an 80% restoration of bus services.

In view of the uncertainty over how to preserve existing supported services, with reference to the previously announced New Funding prior to the present crisis, it is highly likely that we will not proceed with our programme of new and extended services but instead use the funding to supporting existing services during this period of uncertainty.

Libraries

Library buildings may be closed due to the difficulty of social distancing, but library staff have been hard at work enhancing their e-readership by increasing their library of e-books, loaning e-readers and even hand delivering books to the more vulnerable or 'shielded' residents.

Amenity Sites

Update from Cabinet member

We review weekly (and sometimes more often) how the centres are managing, the issues and the amount of waste we are taking in, we know that there is a lot of waste still being kept at residents' properties. Queues are to be expected due to the much-reduced capacity at our sites to cater for social distancing.

From tomorrow (Tuesday 7th June) Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) vehicle restrictions will be eased to allow access to the following: -

From Tuesday

- Bicycles (including cycle towed trailers) with social distancing in place & they will need to queue as part of the traffic flow to be directed to a unloading space by site staff
- All van-based people carriers with seats in the back.

From Wednesday

All trailers that comply with the normal vehicle restrictions except for at **Sidmouth, Totnes** and **South Molton** for now – this is due to congestion caused by trailers on site with limited capacity to accommodate trailers

All pick ups (but not towing trailers as per the normal vehicle restrictions) at all recycling Centres.

Vans/ commercial vehicles currently remain excluded from all of the sites – this will be reviewed shortly when a booking system can be introduced such that the number of vans at each site can be limited to a total per day such that the sites do not become too congested due to the amount of time taken to offload these type of vehicles. Pedestrians are also not allowed to deposit waste as there are health & safety concerns that vehicles may park outside of the sites and walk their waste in. Any pedestrian wanting to dispose of their waste will be asked to contact us if they cannot use the District Council kerbside facilities.

Reminder of the new working practices when visiting a recycling centre in Devon;

To protect the public and staff a series of health protection measures is in force at each centre, including a one-in one-out policy and the two-metre social distancing guidelines.

Unfortunately, this means for the time being site staff will not be able to assist with unloading waste.

In addition:

- Residents displaying coronavirus symptoms, are asked not to visit the recycling centres.
- Payments on site must be by credit/debit card only.

Children and Education: Update from Cabinet member:

Every Children's Services had to put together a COVID 19 Action Plan.

A risk register of vulnerable children, mostly outside care, was established. This was to make sure that daily/weekly contact was maintained through the emergency by a social worker or schools.

Staff have been working from home through Teams. This has been very successful and I'm sure work practices will continue these changes beyond COVID 19. Social work teams are starting to go into the office once a week. This is important because of the stressful environment they work in. They need to be able to talk to colleagues outside a meeting. The number of children in care has remained stable at about 760. The workforce has been brilliant through the emergency.

When the lockdown started the MASH (multiple agency support hub) received less referrals, but as time has gone on referrals have increased, particularly issues associated with domestic violence.

While the Children's Centres are closed the buildings are available for fact to face assessments. Most assessments are being done virtually. Health Visitors and Children Centre staff are working very closely together and COVID 19 has accelerated joint working. Midwives are also working more closely, because of COVID 19. Most families have taken to virtual contact and are being more open about their issues to a camera than they would be if the professional was in the room with them.

Education

Update from Cabinet member

Since the COVID 19 emergency was announced over 300 schools (85%) have remained open for children of key workers and vulnerable children. Dawn Stabb our Head of Education set up a virtual Senior School Leaders Board, with representation from LA Maintained Schools, Academies and Special Schools. To start with they met daily and now meet three times a week. This has been crucial to have agreed guidance and message across all Devon's schools.

At the start on the 24th of March we had 2455 children in school and as the pandemic developed numbers went down to 866. Numbers gradually went up again and just before half term on the 20th of May nearly 4000 children were attending. The attendance of key workers and vulnerable children has been above the National average. Teachers have been brilliant from the start and I can't over emphasize how flexible and imaginative they have been.

The overwhelming majority of children have been at home and schools have been engaging with their students virtually and with workbooks. Devon's school population is about 96000.

Early Years and Childminders have been open as well, about 497 (44%).

When the Government announced that some Primary Year Groups would return to school from the 1st of June 2020, all schools were asked to do a COVID 19 safety assessment. The Senior School Leaders Board assessed the dfe guidance, so advice was consistent across Devon. All school buildings are different, so each school had to make their own decision if they should open for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. About 62% of primary Schools have opened to these three-year groups. Others will open to some, or not open for the time being. Schools are keeping in close contact with parents.

In a survey we carried out just before half term, parents indicated that 30% of Early Years, 40% Reception, 40% Year1 and 50% Of Year 6 would return from the 1st of June.

The government has also indicated that Secondary Schools must have one to ones with Year 10, probably virtually.

We fully appreciate that many parents and teachers are concerned at schools starting to open. It's an individual decision. This virus is going to be with us for some time and we need to find a way to live with it.