

West Down Parish Council

County Councillors report

December 2021

Coronavirus updates from Devon County Council

The link below may be of interest to residents with the situation changing and many interested in what is happening locally this link is a useful starting point for questions and the current situation in Devon.

The link takes you to the Covid-19 pages on the Devon County Council Website, it has daily updated information as to positive cases within the area, information about testing and track and trace.

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-in-devon/coronavirus-data/>

Devon County Council budget

A brief 'hi-level' update on the finance part of DCC operations.

We are rapidly approaching the 'business end' of the financial year where month 6 and 7 figures show no slowdown in demand as we move in to winter, not least where Higher needs in Education requirements are increasing pressures. Winter is the traditional time for a peak surge of demand on services across DCC, but frankly currently every day is 'winter' before we get to Christmas.

One of the key factors in setting our budget for the following year, as well as informing future years setting is the settlement we receive from central Government. This is largely based on a formula which enables the DCC finance team to predict the amount we are likely to receive and set the budget, together with any additional support as 'one offs' e.g. Covid support money is temporary, and not something we can (or frankly would want to given the reason for it) depend on in future years.

The settlement figure or at least a strong idea of the amount for DCC should be known at the back end of December, early January. A bit more levelling up here recognising deprivation in large parts of our largely rural county would be appreciated.

Devon is not the land of milk and honey for many of our residents that many outside of the South West would think, not least in the amount per pupil our school pupils receive compared to other local Authorities.

The various service areas are now putting into the finance team what they think they will need for 2022/23 with plenty of opportunity for members to have a view on budget proposals culminate in the rounds of scrutiny meetings at the end of January and final budget setting at Full Council on the 17th of February 2022 where we set the legally required balanced budget within the resources available to us. Ongoing pressures, largely as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic are likely to have a significant impact on DCC in the same way they are everywhere else in our society.

Cllr John Hart, Leader of DCC is doing a meeting open to all parish councillors on 8th December, Val has the details, I would really appreciate it if representatives from West Down would attend.

Waste and Recycling

The 2020/21 performance statistics have recently been published and Devon's recycling rate reduced to 55.3% from the previous year's 56.6%. The reduction can be linked to the provision of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) which closed for seven weeks during the first lockdown commencing end March 2020. Subsequent social distancing measures reduced site capacities, closure of resale shops and the introduction of booking systems also impacted on the amount of waste processed leading to a reduction in recycling performance.

East Devon once again achieved the highest recycling rate amongst Devon's Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs) with 60% marginally down from previous years 60.5%.

The other seven WCA figures as follows:

- Teignbridge (55.9%);
- Torridge & West Devon (55.2%);
- South Hams (54.7%);
- Mid Devon (53.7%);
- North Devon (49.5%)
- Exeter (27.8%).

While our recycling centres recycling performance remains high at 72%, 2020/21 saw a small reduction from previous year (75%). Reductions across all streams were noted for Devon's HWRCs, notably organic material down 22%. The closure and restrictions to HWRC re-use shops last year resulted in a 64% reduction in sales, equating to 666 tonnes less material resold to members of the public – all HWRC re-use shops have now re-opened.

Families on Free School Meals- Christmas arrangements

Over the past year Devon County Council have provided supermarket vouchers worth £15 per child per week of the school holidays to families who qualify for free school meals, so their children don't go hungry.

For Christmas, this is being doubled, with an extra one-off £30 supermarket voucher, so families will receive a £60 voucher per child for the two-weeks to help with the additional financial pressure the festive period can bring.

[You can find out more about the free school meals holiday voucher scheme on our website.](#)

Children currently receiving benefits-related free school meals and their families can also take part in our Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) scheme for free over the Christmas break.

[You can find out more about the Holiday Activity and Food scheme on our website.](#)

Part of a £5 million pound programme the Council has organised with money from the government's new Household Support Fund to help people who are struggling this winter.

Help with food and utility costs is also available via the government's Household Support Fund, with applications being made through local district councils. The scheme, which runs until Thursday 31 March 2022, can also be used for things like emergency boiler and heating repairs and housing costs. For more information [please visit the Household Support Fund page on our website.](#)

DCC have also partnered with Citizens Advice Devon to help eligible households using pre-paid meters who are struggling to meet their fuel bills. For more information [please visit the Citizens Advice Devon website.](#)

Bus Service Improvement Plan

Very many thanks to the Parish Councils who took part in the high level consultation in the summer.

After taking the proposal arising from the feedback to Cabinet in October we have now published our BSIP (Bus Services Improvement Plan) on the Travel Devon website: [National Bus Strategy - Devon's Response - Travel Devon](#)

What happens next?

This is now with the DfT, who will assess it, alongside other BSIPs submitted from local authorities around the country. They will then allocate us a proportion of the £3billion Bus Back Better funding pot. We haven't been given an indication of when we might hear about this, but anticipate it not being before December.

Once we have been notified of our funding allocation (hopefully all of the funding we have asked for!), we will go out to a full public consultation on the plan – we now anticipate this will be January/February - before commencing delivery of the plan from next April onwards.

In the interim we will be starting the process of forming an Enhanced Partnership with our bus operators, and will also be kicking off the consultation process with some focus group sessions, specifically to find out views from individuals with protected characteristics (such as the young people and those with learning or physical disabilities).

Highway Items

Improvements to the Pothole Repair Process

The Highway Network Response Team have just gone live on the 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.

Capital Budget Settlement

The UK Roads Liaison Group have shared a document with highway authorities that was produced on behalf of the DfT to support their discussions with the Treasury in advance of the Comprehensive Spending Review. The paper laid out five annual investment scenarios ranging from Accelerated Improvement (£1.9bn) through to Decline (£1.25bn). Disappointingly, the Treasury have chosen to set the funding levels for the next three years at 'Decline'. The impact of this decision will undoubtedly mean further deterioration of the network and an increase in the number of defects and a more reactive strategy. The Service is preparing a briefing note with more information that will be shared with Devon MPs.

Vegetation Management Trials

In response to the high number of overgrown vegetation defects that have been recorded this year the Service is carrying out two trials to look at alternative ways of managing the issue. By drawing on support from local arboriculturists residents are being encouraged to support residents to ensure their hedges and trees are cut back to remove current problems and provide information about appropriate maintenance of boundary vegetation. These trials will reshape our processes for the future.

Road Closures

Lynton Cross all going well, the road closure has changed- Iron Letters to Lynton Cross is now closed to allow the other side of the roundabout to be built. Anticipated finish is 10th December. (weather permitting).

Reminder about reporting a highway problem:

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/>

[telephone: 0345 155 1004](tel:03451551004)

One network, shows future roadworks in each place; <https://one.network/>

Drains locators and frequency of inspection (cleaning);

<https://apps1.wdm.co.uk/Live/Devon/PBLC/PIP/map.aspx?cg=kaarb>

Location of and faulty street lights, <https://www.lightsonindevon.co.uk/Public/ReportFault.aspx>

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