

County Councillor's Report 21st May 2020 – Coffinswell

Devon County Council leader John Hart welcomed the Prime Minister's statement as providing some hope but said he wanted to see the details of how re-starting the economy could be achieved safely.

It is vital to get our economy going again but we must do this slowly and surely to avoid any second or subsequent spikes which would see us plunged back into an even more severe lockdown.

Backed by MPs, tourism bodies and other business, the call is to #ComeBackLater, recognising that tourism is the vital lifeblood for many rural economies. However, a sudden influx of tourists into relatively low-level infected areas could reverse the health gains and cause harm to the local community in addition to economic losses.

Devon Trading Standards Service is reminding residents to 'stay home, stay safe and stay scam aware', as new coronavirus (COVID-19) related scams continue to emerge.

There are many steps that can be taken to help protect yourself and others from scams, including:

- Asking any unexpected visitors for ID.
- Trying to rely on trusted contacts for any help that you may need or consider using a service from a 'Buy with confidence' business if you can't get a personal recommendation.
- Trusting your instincts and saying no to any offers, either on the phone, online or in person, that seem suspicious.
- Being wary of unexpected emails or texts and not clicking on links or attachments. Always go to the organisation's website to check correct information and contact details.
- Never give out personal or financial information to people you don't know.
- Try to look up contact details such as phone numbers yourself rather than relying on those given to you over the phone.
- Only making online payments if there is a padlock symbol in the browser and you have carefully checked the site and website address for inconsistencies.

For more information about coronavirus (COVID-19) scams and how to safeguard yourself call the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0808 223 1133 or visit www.devonsomersettradingstandards.gov.uk

If you have received an NHS extremely vulnerable letter, registered for support on the government website but you have not received a food delivery, or you need other help because you are isolated please call the Council on 0345 155 1011. There is a similar Teignbridge number for anyone needing assistance – 01626 215512

Donated equipment, including commodes, walking frames, perching and shower stools, is being collected from households across the county by Millbrook Healthcare Ltd, which works with the County Council to provide community equipment, is collecting the donated items from households across the county to be re-used after testing and cleaning. Millbrook has taken more than 600 calls so far from members of the public offering a wide range of community equipment they no longer need.

To donate an item of community equipment that you are no longer needing, please telephone Millbrook Care to arrange a free collection, on 0330 124 4491.

The County Council reopened its Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) for essential use last week.

The government has defined 'essential use' as waste that 'cannot be stored without causing a risk of injury, health or harm to the resident or other members of their household.' Residents are urged to follow government guidance and only travel to recycling centres if the waste presents a hazard and 'cannot be legally and responsibly disposed of in other ways.'

To protect the public and staff a series of measures will be in force, including a one-in one-out policy and the two-metre social distancing guidelines. These measures are likely to cause significant delays and queues and residents are advised to postpone their visit where possible.

Newton Abbot's Brunel Road Recycling Centre will operate their usual opening hours which will be 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 6pm on Saturday and Sundays. In addition:

- Residents displaying coronavirus symptoms, are asked not to visit the recycling centres.
- Only cars without trailers, with a maximum of two adults per vehicle, will be permitted on site.
- To keep unloading times to a minimum, trailers, vans, pick-ups and commercial vehicles will not be granted access for the time being.
- Payments on site must be by credit/debit card only

The day-to-day work of the Council is slowly returning. I have participated in a Children's Scrutiny meeting on the recent Ofsted report on our Children's Services which judged the Service as Inadequate. I am not a member of this Scrutiny Committee and was very distressed to hear that Devon Care Leavers were found to be living in totally unsuitable conditions; particularly when I had asked questions of Senior Officers about Care Leavers, specifically about living conditions, only late last year. I am a member of the Corporate Parenting Board and we held an emergency meeting two weeks ago with senior Leaders in Children's Care – we heard that a new Director of Improvement has been appointed and we approved of the measures she has taken in her first few days in post.

Last week Devon's Cabinet discussed, in a full agenda, the Highway Maintenance Revenue and Capital Budget. One of the impacts of the corona virus is that the way we can use public transport will change and more people are likely to opt to walk or cycle to get to work and school, and the County Council is being asked to approve over £48 million of spending on maintaining Devon's roads.

The Government has also launched a £23 million fund to invest in improving stretches of the National Cycle Network and encouraging more people to cycle and walk, particularly children and young people so that greener travel choices are the norm – we await the funding outcome for Devon.

In Devon we need to recognise that there will be many people who had not previously thought about cycling or walking to work but will now be dusting off their bikes from the back of the garage or shed and they will be looking to the County Council for support to be able to cycle and walk more safely.

Also, when schools start back, the whole issue of school bus transport is going to need to be thought about in great detail while social distancing requirements are in place and if face masks will have to be worn, as they may be on public transport.

While we all recognise that Devon's roads need to be fixed, the potholes filled and road drainage problems sorted out, now is the time to be looking at all the County Council's highways budgets and plans so we can put more into public transport, cycling and walking. The urgency is now, not in the next year's budget round.

As Chair of Scrutiny I have been working with our Democratic Services team to ensure that we will be running a full scrutiny of Council operations at our meetings scheduled for late June. This is happening whilst two Officers have been transferred to other Covid-19 duties and one is stuck in Germany – although he working very effectively from there!

Finally, I want to say thank you to all the amazing NHS workers, the Social Care staff, the Council bin men & sweepers, those behind the scenes keeping everything going, the teachers, the shop workers, the delivery drivers and those providing vital services - thank for all you have done!

Alistair Dewhirst
alistair.dewhirst@devon.gov.uk
Tel 07836 704127