

County Councillor's Report 19th January - Coffinswell

As we adjust again to staying at home more, and minimising our contacts outside of the home, it's important that we remember to take care of our minds as well as our bodies.

It's perfectly normal to feel anxious or worried right now, whether that's about our own health or that of family members or friends. If you live alone, you may be feeling an even greater sense of isolation or loneliness. Staying at home is difficult, but you are helping to protect yourself and others by doing so.

Every Mind Matters has some helpful information online to support us through this time, whether that's regarding concerns you may have about your finances, or ensuring that you or others have the supplies or support you need, or staying connected with others. <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips/>

It's even more vital to continue:

↔ **Making space**



Covering your face



Washing your hands

Devon County Council is working with partners to ensure that rapid '30 minute' community testing for people without COVID-19 symptoms will soon be available across Devon. Approximately one in three people who have coronavirus do not display symptoms.

A positive or negative result will not remove the need to follow existing COVID-19 measures socially and in the workplace. Employers who have staff and workers who would be eligible for testing are encouraged to register their details. Further information and updates are available on the Devon County Council website.

Critical workers and those in high-risk occupations who still have to attend work, and people who are in contact with vulnerable individuals, such as carers, will be prioritised. Rapid 'lateral flow tests', which provide a result within thirty minutes, will be used.

The first testing site will open at County Hall in Exeter towards the end of January, with further sites to open across Devon through February and March. This will support existing testing arrangements and complement the national roll-out of lateral flow tests in some settings such as universities and schools.

Whether you keep just a few birds as pets or thousands, from 14th December onwards you are legally required to keep your birds indoors or take appropriate steps to keep them separate from wild birds.

Poultry and captive bird keepers are advised to be vigilant for any signs of disease in their birds and any wild birds, and seek prompt advice from their vet if they have any concerns. They can help prevent bird flu (avian flu) by maintaining good biosecurity on their premises. Keepers are encouraged to register their birds with DEFRA so they can be contacted quickly if there is an outbreak in their area and action required. Owners of more than 50 birds are legally required to register their flock but those with fewer than this number are still encouraged to do so.

Poultry and captive bird keepers and members of the public should report dead wild birds to the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77 (option 7), and keepers should report suspicion of disease to APHA on 03000 200 301. Keepers should familiarise themselves with DEFRA's avian flu advice. Public Health England advise the risk to public health is very low and that properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.

As mentioned last month more than 15,000 children across Devon received food vouchers this Christmas as the county council combats holiday hunger. These children were receiving free school meals and their families were able to buy food with the vouchers over the holiday.

After I raised the issue at the County Council arrangements were put in place for families who cannot get to a supermarket.

Schools helped in publicising this to families and alerted us to anyone they feel might miss out. In addition to issuing the vouchers to families directly, we also provided them to Early Help teams, children's centres, food networks and district councils who were able to help vulnerable families who may not be eligible for free school meals.

The county council is continuing to work with local council partners in Team Devon to ensure vulnerable families do not slip through the net.

Many families in Devon have seen their financial circumstances change due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. If families didn't previously qualify for free school meals but their income has recently reduced or stopped, please apply online through the Devon County Council website

Finally, some good news! Three companies have been selected to roll-out full fibre broadband networks on behalf of the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) programme, backed by Government funding.

Airband, Truespeed and Wessex Internet will be installing full fibre broadband across Devon and Somerset to more than 56,000 rural homes and businesses over the next four years. The combined public and private sector investment of around £80million will be in the vanguard of the Government's ambitions to build a Gigabit capable network across the UK.

The three companies all have experience of working in the region and, between them, have already delivered connections to nearly 41,000 premises in the CDS region.

In the new roll-out, Airband will be expanding its full fibre coverage into rural areas of Somerset, East Devon, as well as areas of Mid Devon, South Hams and Teignbridge (Dainton). Truespeed and Wessex Internet will deliver in rural communities in other parts of the South West.

Work is due to start this year for completion in 2024. As mentioned before Teignbridge Council is the only District Council who are involved in financing this roll out. It is third time lucky so let's hope it happens this time.

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