

Devon County Council leader John Hart today pledged the authority will do whatever it can to support residents and communities through the Coronavirus outbreak.

This is an unprecedented situation and many residents will be deeply worried about themselves, their families and how they are going to cope over the coming weeks. I want to assure everyone that the whole council is working flat out alongside our partners in the NHS, districts and others to make sure we put everything we can in place to help people through this. We will do everything it takes to keep our care system fully functioning and ease the immense pressure our hospitals are facing.

We are working with schools, nurseries and colleges to provide the care and support our key workers need to continue in their vital roles. We will redeploy our own staff and resources as necessary to help keep essential services up and running. And we will work with the Local Enterprise Partnership to support and advise local businesses via the Growth Hub as best we can.

All across the County, town and parish councils and community groups are setting up volunteer schemes to keep an eye on their more vulnerable neighbours.

I am happy to pledge that Devon County Council will work alongside districts, towns and parishes, the voluntary sector and local businesses to help build on and support this emerging community response to help those people who are vulnerable, housebound or self-isolating.

Devon has a strong community spirit and by pulling together and supporting one another we will overcome this crisis – however long it takes.

Other actions include:

- A suspension of non-urgent council meetings (pending a relaxation of government rules on democratic processes)
- A move to digital invoicing for the council's suppliers to ensure quick payment and help cash flow for local businesses.
- The physical closure of library buildings to the public and suspension of mobile library services and events. Loan periods are being relaxed and access to digital books is being extended.
- A relaxation of rules relating to bus passes to enable older people to access shops before 9.30 and enable people to take advantage of dedicated shopping times for older people being offered by some supermarkets.

The County Council approved its budget at the end of February in a marathon five-hour session. There was more money for vulnerable children, adult social care and roads and road drainage.

More than £43 million extra will be pumped into vital services with an additional £23.7 million for adult care and health, £11.5 million more for children's services and £1 million more to help deal with drainage issues on the road network.

In total the council's spending will rise by £43.1 million from £498 million in 2019/20 to just over £541 million – when you add the £539.35 million Dedicated Schools Grant it takes the council's spending over the £1 billion mark for the first time in ten years.

The average Band D council tax bill for Devon's services will rise by 3.9 per cent to help pay for it – that's 1.9 per cent for general services and 2 per cent dedicated solely to adult care.

Devon's Cabinet member for finance said: It (*the Budget*) provides significant additional resources to adult social care, children's services and highways which are the things that matter most to our Devon residents. Although there has been a small increase in support from the Government, we need the certainty of future income to protect services.

County Treasurer Mary Davis told councillors: In 2020/21 the authority's core funding will increase by 1.63%. This does not however mean that it has been easy for the authority to set a balanced budget. There are significant ongoing pressures in both adult and children's services with the greatest area of concern being the funding shortfall on the High Needs Block (children with special needs) and the lack of information from Government on what they intend to do about it.

In simple terms Adult Care and Health will rise by £23.714 million to £260.258 million. Children's Services will rise by £11.538 million to £146.845 million. Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity will rise by £0.925 million to £39.713 million. Corporate Services will rise by £4.17 million to

£36.91 million. Finally, Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste will rise by £2.79 million to £57.508 million.

This is patently good news but these figures should be put in context - £2.189 million of the Highways increase is inflation – we still get £1 million more for highway drainage but at the expense of cuts in winter operations and saving made on waste tonnages. In my role of Chair of Scrutiny, I put forward a raft of recommendations that included lobbying Central Government to increase our Public Health Grant, recognising the insufficient funding for prevention work and recording our great concern about recruitment in Health and Adult Care following the introduction of a points based immigration system. During the debate the Lib Dems proposed an additional £4 million for highway drainage, £.5 million for renewal of white lines (have you tried to drive round Penn Inn recently), launching a new Green Devon initiative to bring forward wildlife corridors, wild flower meadows and verges and help with additional tree planting and creating 20 mph zones around all Devon schools.

All this would be paid for by drawing £4.5 million from the Council's Emergency reserve of £18 million and ending wasteful payments to 108 staff who have an essential car user allowance but drive less than one mile a week!

Sadly, this was voted down. In the end It means the Band D bill will rise by £55.17 to £1,439.46.

However, you need to remember that each Devon School Child is underfunded by £294 a year, that the County Council has lost £180 million in Core funding since 2010 and we will end up with a £45 million deficit by March 2021 for Special Education Needs and the Government says this can only be paid for out of the Schools Budget. Austerity has definitely NOT ended.

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NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH UPDATE

I thought people might be interested to have some feedback from Teignbridge Community Watch (NW) meeting last night which I attended on behalf of our scheme.

Apparently the administration from Teignbridge for schemes in this area had 'fallen by the wayside' There is a new initiative which is called Teignbridge Community Watch Hub – this is manned once a week by two area co-ordinators and it is run from Teignmouth police station.

This hub is working closely with local Special Constables and their superintendent for South Devon attended the meeting. The strategic coordinator of DaCCWA also attended, she coordinates NW, Farm Watch Boat Watch etc.

The overall aim seems to be to get a working framework of communication between all the bodies and local NW groups. When this is established it should be easier to report and access information. I already receive police Alerts which I share with the group if they seem at all relevant but it sounds like this type of information sharing will expand.

The OURWatch website is also being overhauled – at the moment it would appear on this website that we are a self-declared group not a registered group even though I had completed all the necessary forms and police checks it would appear these have got lost in 'the ether' so I am in the process of re-registering our group.

In time they hope to be able to offer benefits to members to encourage participation and I will let you know if and when anything like that occurs e.g reduced insurance premiums for members.

They reported that there is a new local initiative called the Rural Crime Prevention Initiative and I will let you know if anything of interest comes from them.

The Specials Superintendent said that the 'Specials' have exactly the same powers as the police (unlike Community police who do not) and they are willing and able to support local communities in any way they request. One such assistance has been by increasing patrols in specified areas to reduce anti-social behaviour. If anyone has any thoughts on how or if we could 'tap into' this then let me know and I will contact our local officer.

Police and Community Hub are promoting information sharing online and are already using Twitter and Facebook, it is likely that this will increase as a means of contacting local policing. Currently there is a Facebook called SPOTTED which runs locally if you put in your area (I have not tested this yet!) and anything you feel is suspicious you can post it on this forum.

I hope this information is of interest and I will keep everyone posted of updates – our vigilance and support of each other in our villages is of great importance – demonstrated by the recent theft from the Pub of their fish delivery between 4am and 6am! – so thank you for being members and contact me if I can assist you in any way

Sheenagh

Outline plan for Climate Emergency

Aim

In light of the increased threat posed to our community and planet by changing climate as highlighted by the IPCC, Coffinswell Parish Council acknowledge the need for urgent action. Change is required if we are to decrease, halt and reverse the rate of temperature rise before we reach tipping point. The wet and windy winter we have just had could be a foretaste of the future normal.

The Council will work with the community to devise an action plan to reduce the Parish's carbon output and to improve ways of capturing carbon, increasing biodiversity and minimising ecological damage to the environment.

Process

19/03 - Councillor Brent, following a brief summary of the current situation, to propose that the Council commit to engaging with the community to lead on developing an action plan for Climate Emergency. Meeting advertised on all possible channels.

Mid - April 2020 - public meeting with ACT to engage the community and develop a working party of interested individuals and Councillors.

Late-April 2020 - working group initial meeting to determine the scope of a Parish Action Plan. Consideration given to including representatives from neighbouring councils to offer a wider cohesive plan.

May 2020 - CPC meeting - target for Declaration of Climate Emergency and to endorse the continued development of the Action Plan.

July 2020 - Target date for adoption of Action Plan.