

**Diptford Parish Council May meeting App 1  
DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT**

**1. VIRTUAL MEETINGS**

2020/21 will be remembered as the time of Coronavirus. The virus has prematurely ended many lives, disrupted the economy and our ways of life.

May I congratulate you all on your acceptance of and adaptation to the new circumstances and technology that has made Virtual Meetings a part of Council and everyday life.

**2. PRINCE PHILIP, THE DUKE OF ENDINBURGH**

I note with sadness the recent death of HRH the Prince Philip at the age of 99, and thoughts are with HRH the Queen & the Royal Family. The Duke's lasting legacy for the South West will be the Ten Tours expedition, part of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards challenge.

**3. CORONAVIRUS**

The Team Devon Local Outbreak Management Board has met throughout the last year to monitor, help to fund, provide guidance and intervene where necessary in the fight against Coronavirus, including overseeing the setting up of the Nightingale Hospital.

The UK development, procurement and delivery of vaccines has been a success story. As I write, over two thirds of the adult population in Devon have received at least their first vaccination, and the 40 and over age range are now invited to book their first jab.

The number of cases has fallen and the latest available data to the week ended 30<sup>th</sup> April show just 111 cases in Devon. Sadly still two deaths in the week ending 30<sup>th</sup> April.

The availability of testing is increasing with the objective of identifying (if possible), those who carry the virus without symptoms.

We are all looking forward to taking the 4 steps to freedom as they progress through the early summer.

The Government responded to the crisis with financial support for the economy, and in Devon we endeavoured to make funds available where needed to avoid hardship.

There is an ongoing need for vigilance as the holiday season makes a slightly cool debut this bank holiday weekend. Good to enjoy the atmosphere of a favourite pub on Friday, however it looked more like an Everest Base Camp than a place of entertainment.

**4. THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS**

One of the truly heartening stories of Coronavirus is the spontaneous creation of support networks by volunteers throughout the Division and Devon. Many congratulations and thanks to you all. You have made such a difference to the lives of so many people shielding, isolating and struggling.

**5. BUDGET**

The approximate budget headlines this year are;

a) Devon County Council have presented another balanced budget for the 2021/22 financial year.

b) The overall expenditure is £578.5 million, an increase of 6.6%.

c) Within the budget there are increases of;

(i) £12 million for mainly increased demand for Education Health and Care plans in Children's Services;

(ii) £22 million for Adult Care & Health Services; and

(iii) 7.5% for Corporate Services;

d) There remains a deficit of some £50 million on our balance sheet for the overspend on the High Needs Block over the last 2 years. We await Government instruction on how this is to be financed;

e) We have increased the DCC element of the Council Tax precept by the maximum permitted 4.99%.

**6. SOCIAL CARE**

With the ambition of improving the integration of services we are taking the Babcock contract for children's services in house from 2022.

Devon is promoting an Early Help strategy in an attempt to tackle issues at source and wrap help around families to reduce the demand for Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) at a later stage. The increased number of EHCPs has put significant pressure on our budget for the last two years.

## **7. INFRASTRUCTURE**

### **a) BROADBAND**

Connecting Devon & Somerset has recently awarded a new contract to Airband to complete fibre to the premises connections for the 90 to 95% sector of properties that do not as yet have Superfast Broadband in the period 2021 to 2024. Maps showing planned connections across the Division are due to be published soon.

For those business premises not included in the Airband stage of the rollout do have a look at the Government Gigabit voucher scheme which can be helpful particularly for groups of premises.

### **b) MOBILE**

Businesses in Not Spots please see the Connecting Devon and Somerset initiative; <https://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/the-cds-mobile-booster-voucher-scheme-guide/> which plans to benefit 1,250 premises with a voucher for a mobile signal booster.

### **c) RAILWAY**

In the South Brent & Yealmpton Division we have made an application for a feasibility study to reinstate an active station in South Brent.

As part of the national Restore your Railway Scheme a daily railway service has been promised for the Okehampton to Exeter line.

### **d) ROADS**

Devon County Council had a budget of £102m for roads in the last financial year, more than has ever been spent before.

In the Division we have benefited from Safer Road Funding for improvements to the A3121 from Hollowcombe Cross, past Ermington to Wrangaton. This will include two new roundabouts at the junction of the A379/A3121 and the B3196/A3121 at Kitterford Cross.

## **8. THE INTERIM DEVON CARBON PLAN**

A report on the responses to an extensive consultation are now being compiled, and we are expecting this to be published in the summer of 2021. Devon County Council remain committed to achieving net zero carbon status.

Within the County Council we continue to reduce our Carbon Footprint. As part of our strategy the conversion of streetlighting to LED should be completed in about 18 months.

## **9. THE ECONOMY**

Devon County Council have purchased the former Flybe Training Academy and are turning it into a high-tech Future Skills Centre specialising in digital, engineering, construction and clean growth. The Centre will cater for learners of all ages, skills, and qualifications and prepare them for the economy of the future.

At County Hall we are developing online support for business start-ups, the self-employed, innovation and growth.

## **10. EDUCATION**

This has been a challenging year for schools and we congratulate teachers who have delivered lessons online and parents who have found themselves adapting to a second career in front of a virtual blackboard. We hope their endeavour and the catch-up programme now unfolding will ensure that our children's education will not suffer.

The gradual drift to Academy status continues in Devon schools, and we remain committed to ensuring that maintained schools receive the very best support we can offer. Per pupil funding has now increased to £4,000 per primary school pupil and £5,000 per secondary school pupil. Whilst we have moved up the rankings slightly in terms of average funding we are still towards the lower end of the table. Lobbying will continue to ensure that the full costs of rurality are taken into account.

## **AND LOCALLY**

### **11. GARA BRIDGE**

A temporary chicane at Gara Bridge is being trialled. I am hopeful that the trial will result in a scheme that prevents future damage, does not detract unnecessarily from the setting of this Listed Bridge and does not impede access other than to vehicles too large for the bridge to carry. I look forward to the post road scheme trial discussion.

A request has been made to Daniel Ferris to arrange a meeting with Diptford Parish Council to discuss the permanent solution before a decision is made.

### **12. COUNTY COUNCIL AND POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER ELECTIONS**

A reminder that the above elections take place tomorrow from 7.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. Thursday 6th May.

Special provisions will be in place at polling booths to ensure social distancing including sanitising gel for use before and after voting. Voters are requested to wear masks and to take their own pencil with them this year. Masks and pencils will be available for those who may forget.