

# Parish report from your District Councillors

## May 2nd 2022

### Council Tax Energy Rebate



Just over 9,000 households who live in Council Tax bands A to D and who paid by Direct Debit on 1 April have now been paid their £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate by South Hams District Council. Despite guidance issued to councils stating that payments should be made by the deadline of 30 September, South Hams District Council knew that their residents needed this extra help as soon as possible.

Staff worked rapidly to set up the systems to those already registered by direct debit, so they could be paid as early as possible. Whereas some councils nationwide have told their residents that they won't receive payment until as late as the September deadline. To date, the Council has issued just over 9,000 payments, which was paid to residents' bank accounts last week.

Those with different direct debit payment dates throughout April will receive similar payments soon. An application form is live on the Council's website, for those who do not pay by Direct Debit, and these will be processed from May.

### Solar Panels on South Hams Leisure Centres

In a meeting on 7 April, the Council's Executive Committee heard about the steady progress being made by the organisation since the approval of its Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy in December 2020. The goals set in this strategy include reducing the Council's own carbon footprint to net-zero by 2030 and increasing biodiversity on its own land by 10% in 2025.

To back up the organisation-wide efforts to lower carbon emissions, the Executive Committee approved plans to loan Fusion Leisure £500,000 for the installation of solar panels at all four District Council leisure centres. A study on greenhouse gas emissions caused by Council activity was commissioned last year. It showed that the biggest proportion of the organisation's emissions relate to its activities from leased assets, franchising and outsourcing. That includes the four leisure centres.

The installation of the panels will reduce the carbon emissions of the centres by 131 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCOe), equivalent to the annual energy emissions of 38 homes. Predictably, the emissions study also found that the reduction in staff travel caused by the pandemic led to a big saving in CO2 released into the atmosphere; a saving of 234 tCOe was made, the equivalent of powering 66 homes for a year.

Many Council staff continue to work remotely, which continues to reduce emissions significantly. To capitalise on these gains made, however, an electric vehicle project is about to begin shifting the Council's fleet of vehicles over to electric power. The project has the potential to save around 160 tCOe per year - the equivalent emissions of 45 homes.

## Ukrainian Refugees



It's been a busy time leading the district support for the Homes for Ukraine scheme. We are doing all we can to ensure that we rapidly undertake the accommodation checks and are now also undertaking more visits to Ukrainians that have arrived, in order to get some essential financial support to them, and this has been done this week. The total number of host properties successfully matched with Ukrainian guests so far is 52 in South Hams (and the team are also supporting

another 34 in West Devon).

There is of course a time lag in the data being received by the Council from Government. We anticipate the actual number to be higher than this. To date we have undertaken 79% of the accommodation checks we've been notified of; so far we have been informed of 23 Ukrainian guests actually arriving in the South Hams through the scheme.

For each guest arriving through the scheme, the government will provide funding to Councils of £10,500. We are pushing Devon County Council to understand how much of it they will 'top-slice' and therefore how much we have available to fund wrap-around support.

We do however now need to focus on what the longer term wrap-around support looks like. With that in mind, in the past week we have:-

- Arranged a drop in briefing session for Town and Parish Councils to ask any questions on the scheme or to share any steps they are taking to support Ukrainians on a locality basis.
- Worked with Team Devon to develop a series of webinars for Hosts and Sponsors over the coming month. Sophie Cobbledick from our Housing Team continues to play a lead role on the Team Devon work strand.
- Finalised plans with the CVS to deliver signposting, linking up translators to hosts / community groups / other organisations supporting our Ukrainian guests, supporting us in facilitating regular webinars with hosts and guests
- Formally launched the Fusion Leisure Homes for Ukraine free membership offering
- Gone live with our simple online form to enable hosts to sign up to receive their £350 monthly welcome payment.

Anyone wanting to become a sponsor must be able to offer a minimum of six months' accommodation. This can be anything from a spare room to an empty home. They will be

eligible for a £350 payment per month, per address. This will not impact benefits or single person Council Tax discounts. Refugees old enough to work are able to claim Universal Credit and those of pension age can receive Pension Credit and Housing Benefit. Anyone offering support that is not accommodation or finance can email the council at [supportforukraine@swdevon.gov.uk](mailto:supportforukraine@swdevon.gov.uk)

Additionally, the Government has published a guide for Ukrainian guests, which includes advice on a whole range of topics including how to access benefits, finding work, etc. This will be available in Ukrainian. The guide can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/welcome-a-guide-for-ukrainians-arriving-in-the-uk>

A recently launched website - [www.devon.gov.uk/supporting-ukraine](http://www.devon.gov.uk/supporting-ukraine) - is the single point for information in Devon.

## Waste Update



Significant disruption to the garden waste collections continue due to staff shortages. These are mainly due to illness and the difficulty in recruiting workers. The waste and recycling collections are fully resourced and are operating as we would wish. FCC are unable to carry out any recovery of the garden waste as recovery of black bins and recycling is being prioritised.



If a resident's bin is not collected on their scheduled day, we are advising residents to keep their brown bin out until 5pm the following day and if it isn't collected, then to take their bin in and present on their next collection day.

Officers continue to work closely with FCC to ensure as many collections are made as possible, but in order to ensure we can hold FCC to account contractually please encourage all residents to report their missed collection online.



We do not yet know when those areas which have not switched to the box recycling system will do so.

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## New Household Support Fund



Details are starting to emerge of the government's intentions on this. Last year the funding, which gets allocated to upper tier authorities, had very little guidance. This year the government have stated that 33% of the funding should be spent on supporting children, 33% on pensioners, with the remainder allocated based on local need.

While we are still awaiting final funding allocations, initial Team Devon discussions are proposing that DCC use the children's element as they did last year, to provide additional free school meals and the suggestion is that a one-off payment is made to those of pensionable age in receipt of Council tax support i.e. already in receipt of a benefit. Across Devon that equates to some 19,000 individuals and would result in a payment of around £85.

## STEP ON ...



This new scheme will help local people get a foot on the housing ladder. Anyone renting a social housing property can apply for a £5,000 Step On grant to help them with their deposit to buy a shared ownership home. It is designed to encourage families to move on, freeing up socially rented homes.

[www.southhams.gov.uk/step-on](http://www.southhams.gov.uk/step-on)

## Additional Funding for the Council



We have been successful in a funding bid to DCC / Public Health on behalf of all Devon Districts for funding to support further outbreak management. District Councils will be continuing promotion of infection, prevention and control measures within workplace settings to limit outbreaks of infection and knock on effects of impacts on local

communities. The Council will receive £55,000 and the funding is required to support public health activities directly related to the COVID-19 response, such as testing, non-financial support for self-isolation, support to particular groups (CEV (clinically extremely vulnerable) individuals, rough sleepers), communications and engagement, and compliance and enforcement.

To help guide applications, examples of the types of project the fund will consider supporting are:

- Digital skills and inclusion projects
  - Social inclusion and connectedness projects
  - Mental health interventions
  - Employability skills
  - Projects increasing community access to outside space
  - Inter-generational support projects
  - Befriending services
  - Innovative solutions to combating loneliness.
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## 101 call handling and reporting to the police



Following concerns being raised by Councillors over 101 police call handling and reporting to the police, the local commander for that department has issued the following message for Members: *We encourage the public and our partners to report crime, intelligence, ASB and incident of concern and we understand the frustrations individuals experience, when they feel let down by the service.*

*As a force we acknowledge performance is a long way from that we desire and offer our apologies.*

*Below is a list of activity being progressed looking to improve how we response to calls for service;*

- £2M investment in more staff during 2022/23 - which given recruitment and training will be implemented by Christmas, not before*
- Investment in a new switchboard*
- Investment in a new telephony software platform*
- Investment in a new website*
- Seeking more investment in 23/24 and 24/25 for additional staff, to bring our performance up to the level we desire*