

DCC Report for Petrockstowe Parish Council, March 2022

Help for Ukraine

Still lots of work going on behind the scenes but 'Team Devon', including DCC, the District Councils and Devon Association of Local Councils have pledged to work together to support Ukrainian refugees seeking sanctuary in the UK, in particular those with relatives in Devon.

Individually, councils have also taken steps to cut Russian links, such as through contracts for energy provision. And any few remaining investments within the Devon Pension Fund, linked to Russian assets, are being sold off quickly.

Ukrainian and Polish Authorities have also asked for financial/charitable contributions rather than donations of equipment etc as they have already been inundated with offers of help.

Storm Eunice

As you all know, Storm Eunice caused severe disruption and damage, with winds reaching up to 100mph in some places. The Highways Network Operations Control Centre took almost 1,300 calls during the storm period and a team of 150 Highways Officers, contractors and more than 70 tree surgeons cleared debris including rocks, trees, and branches from minor roads. Over 400 trees were uprooted. Gritters also had to be deployed due to falling road temperatures.

There were extensive power outages across Devon, and in particular Torrington Rural. I am well aware of the issues we had locally with electricity blackouts and I raised this with the Emergency Planning Team at DCC who passed this onto Western Power Distribution, though DCC does not have the power to reprioritise WPD's restoration plans. At the peak of the storm on Friday, WPD were dealing with over 60,000 premises across Devon and Cornwall, and nearly 10,000 of those were registered as Priority Customers.

DCC's Incident Management Team took the decision to proactively contact certain groupings of people known to DCC Adults and Childrens services, where they potentially would be vulnerable if left with no power. This happened, and a number of welfare issues were successfully resolved.

A386 landslide

Works are progressing well; early uncertainties over "lead times" for material supply have been resolved without causing delay, which is positive.

Based on current progress on site and thanks to the requested increased resources and weekend working, the specialist contractor's latest programme of works indicates that we should be able to take the lane closure off in the early part of the week commencing 04/04/22.

DCC Budget

When not dealing with landslides, storms and power outages, the major work this month has been setting and approving the new DCC Budget for the 2022-23 financial year. In summary, the revenue budget will increase to £629 million, with a 10.5% increase (£29.6m) for Adult Social Care, 10.8% (£17m) for Children's Services.

Since the provisional budget was produced, it had been possible to include another £1 million on drainage and potholes and maintain £329,000 to support community groups. In addition, there would be an £8 million contribution from the NHS to help deliver adult and social care.

DCC's Council Tax precept will increase by 2.99% (the lowest since 2015).

While funding has increased for services, it has been an extremely tight budget to set. DCC is taking nearly £23 million out of reserves to help balance the budget, and according to our Chief Executive, **76% of DCC's expenditure goes on just over 3% of Devon's population**. I hope that gives you an idea of the challenges we face. There is a huge demand on our Adult and Children's Services as we now come out of the pandemic. Demographic pressures are also increasing our spend, with an ageing population and adults with disabilities, health conditions, learning difficulties, etc. living longer.

Our aim throughout as a Council and Administration is to protect the young, the old and the vulnerable. And that will remain... but I also want to see ways we can ensure we do this in the future without necessarily spending more than three quarters of our budget on just 3% of the population. That will be the big challenge in the coming years/decades....

Free School Meal Vouchers

Families of nearly 19,000 children in Devon have been sent supermarket vouchers this February half-term thanks to one-off government funding that DCC have used to continue our drive to combat holiday hunger the county.

Over the past year, DCC have invested over £4.7 million worth of government funding on providing nearly 140,000 supermarket vouchers for families who qualify for free school meals so their children don't go hungry over the school holidays. Securing additional one-off funding means the scheme is able to operate again over the upcoming February half term break and Easter holiday, with vouchers worth £15 per child per week automatically sent to families of children currently receiving free school meals to help them buy food.

Covid Update

I hope this is a promising 'sign of the times' that I have been able to leave this update until last. Key message is covid has not gone away and advice is still to stay at home if you test positive and only come out if negative on day 5 and day 6.

Covid rates in Devon have increased but hospitalisations remain low/stable.

As ever, any other issues you'd like me to look into please let me know.

Best regards,
Andrew