

Coronavirus

- Stats – As of 16th November DCC area of Devon now up to 6,610 coronavirus infections since the start of the pandemic.
- Since the 14th November that is a weekly increase of 947 infections.
- By way of comparison... in Torridge there were 59 new infections in the last 7 days, North Devon 148 in the last 7 days, West Devon 59 cases in the last 7 days.

At my request, the DCC Public Health Team have had a look at the data in Torridge and have confirmed they are very low numbers – following the pattern of mostly single or household cases, with a few in workplaces, a couple from primary schools, and four cases picked up in care homes. In general, the cases are scattered, tending to be scattering of 1-2 cases cropping up in workplaces, cases picked up by routine staff and resident testing in care homes etc. Torridge is still one of the lowest places in the country and all positive cases are being followed up, by NHS Test and Trace or PHE.

The key message for our residents is to keep their distance, particularly important if they are over 60 or under 60 with poor health. The Government guidance is very good on this point.

There is no doubt that the residents of Petrockstowe, Torrington Rural and indeed all of Devon have put in a magnificent effort to keep the virus at bay for as long as possible. Please do make sure that those who need support get support and please do follow the rules and guidance during this difficult time. If you need any help on anything please don't hesitate to get in touch and I will do all that I can to help.

The following statement from the Director of Public Health, Dr Virginia Pearson does help explain the context behind recent developments:

“The number of incidents of coronavirus in Devon is still below the national average, however cases have been rising across the county in line with the rest of the country over the past month, in all our communities and in all age groups, although the majority – 55 per cent – are in young adults aged 16 to 39.

“In Exeter, where we saw cases increase in early October mainly due to cases in university students, they have fallen significantly over recent weeks thanks to prompt action by the university and public health, and are now again below the national average. Around 40% of Exeter cases relate to the University of Exeter. Non-university student cases in Exeter are well below the national average, and there is no evidence of significant spread of the virus between student and non-student populations in the city.

“But we know that the virus has been spreading in adults of working age, often in social settings. We must continue to take extra care and must never drop our guard.

“Testing capacity has increased in Devon, and the number of tests completed has been rising steadily since August, with the number of tests done doubling.

“Most current cases have had contacts traced through the NHS Test and Trace system. The latest performance shows over 75 per cent of contacts are followed up in Devon.

“It should be said that by and large, Devon residents, shops, businesses, educational establishments and care homes, have all behaved impeccably to limit the impact, and have followed national guidance around social distancing, hand hygiene and wearing of face coverings. And that has undoubtedly kept the number of positive cases lower in Devon, keeping us in the lowest of the government’s alert levels.

“However, national data emerging in more recent weeks has shown that, should the country take no additional measures beyond the current restrictions, England would be exceeding the ‘worst case scenario’ levels.

“Public Health Devon supports the need for a time-limited lockdown. If we don’t take extra steps now, numbers will continue to rise and it will put additional pressure on our busy hospitals. We are already seeing our local hospitals having to cancel non-urgent operations.”

“Devon’s response has been first rate, and we have all pulled together – Devon residents included – to limit the impact of coronavirus, and that is what has kept the number of positive cases low, sufficient that we are at the lowest alert level in the country. However, more needs to be done to halt the rising case numbers and the impact on the NHS. We now need to make sure we are in the best possible position to come out of the national lockdown by driving down rates. We are asking all local people to help by following the public health guidance to the letter.”

I know it will be a difficult month – but we got through the first lockdown and I know we will get through the second. Please do continue to follow the public health guidance – *hands, space, face* – and together I know we will get through this latest lockdown.

Covid Grants

Devon County Council has temporarily re-opened the COVID-19 Fund to provide flexible funding resources to organisations working with communities who are disproportionately impacted by coronavirus. This includes those who are clinically extremely vulnerable, and the fund is designed to help mitigate for the social and economic consequences of the second National Lockdown.

Applications opened on Monday 9th November 2020 and will close on 2nd December 2020. Applications will need to include details of how much funding will be required and how you have assessed the need for that amount. Grants will typically be between £300 and £700, although in exceptional circumstances we may make offers of up to £1,000.

More information online here - <https://www.devon.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-in-devon/document/covid-19-fund/>

North Devon Link Road Upgrade

- The Government has confirmed it is awarding DCC £60 million to upgrade the North Devon Link Road between South Molton and Barnstaple.
- Sections of the road will be widened to provide better overtaking opportunities and improve journey time reliability, and eight junctions will be upgraded to improve safety.
- Junction improvements also include improvements to Westleigh Junction, Haywood Rd Roundabout and Buckleigh Junction on the A39 in Bideford.

Highways

- Please do arrange a follow up meeting with Highways, if you haven't already to discuss the Parish priorities for the forthcoming year... Parish meetings we have had so far have worked well.

Cycle Path Link from Tarka Trail to Torrington

- There is a consultation out to use the 'Rolle Rd' route to Mill St and the preferred 'link' between the Trail and the Town. You can respond here - <https://www.torringtoncommons.org/2020/10/taddiport-cycle-path-proposal-2020/>

Deepmoor Recycling Centre

- Remains open for essential use but please note it will be undergoing resurfacing works on Saturday 21st November 2020. Due to the nature and scale of these works, the Recycling Centre will have to be closed to the public on that day (1 day only).

Schools and School Transport

- Despite the lockdown there has been a good return to School with the latest attendance figures for schools at the end of last week in Devon at 93% (compared with 89% nationally). All Schools in Torrington Rural have had an attendance rate of over 90%.
- It is now mandatory for pupils to wear face coverings on school transport. Previous guidance asked pupils aged 11 and over to wear face coverings unless they were exempt, however some did not.
- Since November 2nd it has been a condition of travel.
- The County Council will operate a 'two strikes' policy. If a student is found not wearing a face covering by the school or transport operator on two occasions, and there is no record of them being exempt from using one, they will be refused travel for a period of time.
- Those travelling on Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport will not be included in this new policy, as the majority of children are in categories which exclude them from wearing face coverings. However, passengers with SEN who can wear a face covering are encouraged to do so.

Support for Parents/Children

- The Government have awarded DCC more than £2 million to support vulnerable people, children and families over Winter.
- School Holiday Activities and Food Programme will be expanded covering Easter, Summer and Christmas in 2021.
- Councils will distribute the funds rather than Schools as they are best placed to directly help the hardest hit families and individuals, as well as provide food for children who need it over the holiday.
- Local Authorities will receive the ring fenced funding at the beginning of December.

Alongside this:

- The Healthy Start scheme payments are set to increase – they support pregnant women or those with children under four who have low income and are in receipt of benefits to buy fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Additional funding for food distribution organisations.

As ever, if there are any other issues you'd like me to look into please don't hesitate to contact me.