

Cllr Samuel Devon County October Update Report

Transport

The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) will be going to cabinet this month, I should be receiving an invitation shortly to have a meeting following cabinet to hear more about Devon's submission to the DfT, this is the opportunity for us to ask questions about our area and what we are submitting. A huge amount of work has been going on to get to this point, however we wouldn't like to speculate on what we may get back from government.

If you can feedback to me any local issues, I would appreciate this.

There is currently a shortage of bus drivers, the industry has been disproportionately hit by covid, there are new drivers coming into the industry and going through training, the Stagecoach drivers have also been offered a pay increase which may help to make the role more attractive.

Rail

The Dartmoor Line will open soon, over the weekend it was lovely to see Okehampton celebrate its 150 years since it was first opened and 50 years since it closed, it will bring a huge boost to education, commuting and leisure travel between Okehampton, Crediton and Exeter.

This is a significant achievement for DCC as it was the strength of vision Devon County Council showed in its Devon Metro strategy that kept this idea going. We invested significant sums for the Okehampton Sunday service to show this could work. It is remarkable how much progress has been made, with Cranbrook and Newcourt stations opened, Marsh Barton now under construction and Edginswell allocated New Stations Fund moneys. Applications have been made to Restoring Your Railway for Cullompton station and Tavistock reopening and to the Levelling Up Fund for the West Devon Transport Hub.



Marsh Barton Station Works

Schools/Education.

Schools - The schools were apprehensive about returning after the summer holidays – and unsure about the new Covid regulations. Our Public Health and Education departments are working hard to support the return and offer advice and guidance.

To date around 150 new positive cases are being reported daily. To put this into context this is out of a total DCC school population of c.140K children.

The Head of Service, Dawn Stabb, says that on the whole ‘the schools are upbeat and looking forward’.

Vaccination Programme - The schools vaccination programme is starting this next week. There have been a couple of anti-vac protests outside schools – so we will have to wait and see what happens as the programme is rolled out.

Fuel - Fuel shortages have had a minimal effect - there have been a few bus/taxi services that were unable to run - to date no reports of teachers being unable to get to work.

Update on the new special school

Cabinet will be looking to secure further funding at their next cabinet meeting this month.

Ive been informed at the end of last week that planning permission has been gained and a sponsor, has been appointed to run the new school. However due to a number of critical factors the cost of delivering the new school has increased. The reasons for this include the volatility of the current construction market, an increase in the cost of raw materials due to unprecedented demand across the sector, and a shortage of key skilled labour against high demand.

Due to the above there has been a delay to the project which is now not expected to be complete until after the Spring half term in February 2023. However, officers continue to work with the Trust to secure temporary accommodation to ensure the school can open in September 2022 as planned.

Any further update I get around this I will let you know.

Children's Social Care.

Ofsted – as you are undoubtedly aware the service is rated as 'inadequate' – and has been for some years.

There is a tremendous amount of work going on, in every part of the service, and the new cabinet member Cllr Andrew Leadbetter is confident that we will ultimately succeed. – not least because we have a new senior management team in place

Workforce – Overall the issue remains that we do not have sufficient qualified social workers, we are struggling to recruit, and many posts are covered by temporary agency workers.

A paper went to the last Cabinet meeting detailing a whole raft of ways that we are going to address the shortfalls – such as increasing pay, offering better working conditions, ramping up the in-house academy to 'grow our own' to name a few. This represents a £3M+ investment.

If you would like any information about any local issues in particular, please do contact me and I will liaise with relevant officers within DCC.

Best wishes

Lois Samuel