

December Report - DCC report for Okehampton Rural Area

Rail

The Dartmoor Line- On 17 November 2021 Transport Secretary Grant Shapps dispatched the first passenger train to run on the Dartmoor Line for over 50 years. This has been made possible by £40 million of government investment through the Restoring your Railway programme. Devon County Council invested considerable funding to keep the line and the dream alive by funding the Summer Sunday service and commissioning the initial report into reopening the line to passenger services, this report gave Network Rail and GWR the basis for the reopening.

I would like to personally thank OkeRail and the local community for all their hard work in making this happen.

Covid

Confirmed cases continue to rise in Devon with the main risings in North Devon and Torridge. The highest figures remain with the 10-16 age group with young people, largely asymptomatic, passing on to parents/carers with the 40-50 age group the second highest. Hospital admissions also rising albeit at a much lower rate of rise – even so, presently there are 168 patients in our four hospitals with Covid, up from 111 early November. Deaths remain relatively low and flatlining over the past few weeks now.

Vaccinations – 94% of Devon's population have had at least one dose.

Booster or 3rd dose –

- age 80+ - 81% jabbed
- 75-79 – 88%
- 70-74 – 71%
- 65-69 – 50%
- 60-64 – 31%
- 55-59 – 25%
- 50-55 – 21%

Afghan Refugees

We now have about 150 refugees in the county temporarily housed in hotels in Exeter and Exmouth with a number of rescued cats and dogs from the well-publicised animal sanctuary in the Tiverton area.

Household Support Fund

Allocated from the Department for Work and Pensions to each upper tier local authority in England. The notional fund for the DCC administrative area equates to £5,064,876.

The fund is for households facing financial hardship this winter, helping them to cover the cost of food, energy and water bills and/or any related essential costs. At least 50% of the fund must be used to support households with children.

The fund is being allocated across the county through various gateways such as (not exclusively) CAB – Energy Relief Scheme; Devon Food Network; Early Help Locality Teams; Action for Children Centres; Healthy Start Food Boxes and Homeless Support Groups, with £880,000 going to District Councils to provide help and support to those who are struggling financially.

Eligible cohort for Free School Meals (FSM) – Holiday Lunch Food Vouchers for Christmas and Easter - £15 per child.

One-off additional generic food voucher (one £50 voucher/FSM eligible family for Christmas 2021 – estimated at c15k families.

Workforce

Resourcing – As with many employers the Council is experiencing challenging recruitment difficulties across a wide variety of professions in addition to our usual difficulties with Social Workers and engineers.

We are experiencing recruitment difficulties with engineers, IT staff, solicitors, public health nurses, Human Resources staff and finance.

HR are working with service areas to ensure we maximise our use of social media and look at running targeted recruitment campaigns, providing good information about DCC to candidates and providing positive interview experiences. Resourcing will be an area of priority for Human Resources over the next year.

Demand for services across the council continues to be high, and the majority of service areas are experiencing high demand, including Corporate Services. With vacancies in the workforce, plus covid related absences, this continues to put a lot of pressure on the Councils workforce.

Social Work Recruitment in Children's Services – is beginning to see some improvement and more appointments are being made. The position with the volume of agency staff available is also improving. The focus continues to be making permanent Social Worker appointments and it continues to be challenge in a really competitive market.

HR and Childrens Services have a short/medium and long term recruitment plan in place. Melissa's new leadership team is now complete with 2 new starters joining the Council in September and October.

Climate Change

Devon Climate Emergency - A consortium of the local authorities involved in the Devon Climate Emergency partnership were successful in their funding bid to the South West Energy Hub to deliver nine events across Devon during the COP26 fortnight (which was the first two weeks of November 2021). A total of £18,360 was awarded and was matched by £28,000 of funding from the local authorities. Most of the events were community led in partnership with local authorities. Feedback was that these were very well received.

DCC Carbon Offsetting – In order to achieve its net zero carbon target by 2030, DCC has committed to carbon offsetting for its residual emissions. The approach agreed through the DCC Carbon Reduction Plan was a ramped approach to this carbon offsetting, to cover 5% of residual emissions in Year 1 (19/20) of the Plan, rising up to 100% by 2030. Initially this was planned to be achieved through the purchase of Woodland Carbon Credits; but by Year 3 (21/22) it was proposed to use land purchase and woodland creation as the offsetting mechanism (i.e. multiple environmental / economic benefits, with DCC investing in an asset). In practice, both the purchase of Woodland Carbon Credits and the acquisition of land for woodland establishment have proved to be far more problematic (and expensive) than originally anticipated. Despite this, we achieved our first success in land acquisition recently through the purchase of 28 acres between Okehampton and Exbourne.

Retrofitting our estate

Recently approved at cabinet a £3.3 million scheme that will cut carbon emissions and reduce energy use on our buildings in Exeter, Barnstaple, Tavistock and Honiton. Insulation will be improved and solar panels and air source heat pumps will be installed along with mechanical ventilation that recovers heat and LED lighting.

Locations;

- Great Moor House in Exeter,
- Taw View in Barnstaple,
- Abbey Rise in Tavistock
- St Michael's in Honiton.
- Lucombe House at County Hall
- further five buildings are being retro-fitted using a separate, £2 million grant and solar panels were being installed on a number of the county's salt depots.

Work will start this month and be completed in 2022

Children's Services

Making Devon the Child Friendly Council

You will all be aware that the Council has recently been developing its strategy for the next 4 years [Strategic Plan | 2021 – 2025 | Devon County Council](#)

The strategy will go to Full Council to be ratified on 2 December.

For the first time ever, the narrative that flows throughout focusses on our intent on making Devon the family Friendly Council. This means that the needs of children and their families flows through everything that we do as a council.

Our Cabinet member Cllr Andrew Leadbetter have an aspiration to make sure Devon can self-identify and can be recognised as, the Child Friendly County, where children, young people and their families can live safe, happy and healthy lives. This means that all children have access to a good education; prospects to enter further and higher education without leaving the county, and being able to secure work that is inspiring and competitive in salary. Giving children and young people the right start in life wherever possible is vital.

Melissa and her team are focussed on delivering a service to families that provides the right help at the right time and from the right source. To do this we need to listen to the views of children and families; to better understand their needs and to help them to identify their strengths and find their own solutions. We recognise this as 'Restorative Practice', a model that Leeds also uses in its work with young people and families.

Significant Council funding for Recruitment and Retention

In September, Cabinet agreed a total of £4.4 million in funding to support Children's Services on it's improvement journey. On top of the £3.4 million annual funding, a further £1.1 million was agreed to support the recruitment of social workers into Devon. There is a national shortage of Social Worker's and recruitment and retention has been a stumbling block for us for some time. The funding has enabled us to create an attractive recruitment and retention package that we believe will act to stabilise the workforce and help us to deliver our critical social care services for children and families in Devon.

Christmas Holiday Free school meals vouchers

Please see the article on the Devon County Council website

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/news/free-school-meals-holiday-vouchers-doubled-for-christmas/> and share this news with families that may be eligible in your community. Families in Devon on low-incomes, whose children receive free school meals, will get extra support this Christmas to help them buy food during the holidays.

Children currently receiving benefits-related free school meals and their families can also take part in our Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) scheme for free over the Christmas break. It aims to provide a wide range of fun and enriching activities and nutritious food in a safe and sociable environment for children and young people to develop new skills or knowledge and try out new experiences, make friends and have fun. You can find out more about the Holiday Activity and Food scheme on our website.

There are a few other things I wanted to highlight this month:

Adult care

Proud to Care campaign update

Members have received a Proud to Care Toolkit via email, designed to help us all to reach out into our communities across our towns and parishes.

Please feel free to click on the link:- '[find your calling](#)' and promote [careers and training opportunities in care](#). For more details.

If we can encourage a handful of people in each market and coastal town into the caring workforce then we will have made a significant impact on our workforce challenges.

Award winning care home in Exmouth

Cranford Residential Home in Exmouth, one of our independent care providers, has just won a Great British Care Awards Regional Finals for Workforce Development. The award is well deserved recognition for the work taking place in Cranford Residential Home including a successful training programme with progression routes for all staff which has made a difference to their ability to recruit and retain staff. Cranford Residential Home has also been shortlisted for the Caring-UK national award in the 'Commitment to Workforce Development' category.

Workforce fund

Devon will be receiving £2.4M as part of the [workforce recruitment and retention fund](#) to invest in supporting the workforce recruitment and retention in our adult social care providers. Workforce recruitment and retention is one of our key challenges and this fund will provide an additional resource over the winter period. We are currently working to identify how we can make best use of this fund and have the most impact.

Successful bid to the UK Community Renewal Fund

Devon County Council has been successful in a bid to the UK Community Renewal Fund. The collaboration project between Adult Care and Health, Adult and Community Learning, and Employment, Economy and Skills teams called 'Ability not Disability - co-designing an employment pathway' has received £613,000.

The funding will support an innovative programme of employment activity for disabled individuals within the county. The programme will extend a pathway to work approach for those with an ongoing barrier to employment and a disability. The programme will use a '[Kickstart](#)' model but with wrap around support for people with disabilities. The outcome of the programme is to enable more people with disabilities to enter the world of paid employment.

ASC COVID-19 Winter plan

The government recently published its [Adult Social Care COVID-19 winter plan](#) which sets out a number of actions including for local authorities, care providers and local NHS organisations. The plan focusses on preventing and controlling the spread of infection in care settings, supporting COVID-19 and flu testing and vaccination. The

plan is clear on collaboration across the system particularly on safe discharge from NHS settings, the role of social prescribing and of course workforce capacity and sustainability and supporting the people who provide care. We are working to align our local plan and the national plan and to incorporate this into the local ICS Devon winter plan.