

*County Council*  
Thursday, 18th February, 2021



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## **AGENDA**

**8. Questions from Members of the Council (Pages 1 - 10)**

Answers to questions from Members of the Council pursuant to Standing Order 17.





## QUESTIONS TO THE CABINET MEMBERS

Thursday 18 February 2021

### 1. **QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BIEDERMAN** **Re: Number of Vaccinations**

- How Many vaccines have been carried out so far in Devon in Numbers and Percentages?
- How Many have been done in North Devon in percentages & numbers.
- How many Care Homes & Staff have been done?
- What is the system being used to decide which people are to be invited in?
- When does he expect all over 80's and those in the highest category to be vaccinated by?

### **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD**

The number of people receiving vaccinations is increasing on a daily basis so the numbers quoted correspond to the date referenced in the response.

- As of the 11th February there has been 284,342 total vaccination carried out in Devon. The figure for Devon is the ICS/STP footprint which includes Plymouth and Torbay.
- There are no published figures broken down to District Council level.
- As of the 10th February out of the 283 older peoples care homes in Devon (DCC area) 8 are outstanding now for vaccination visit. This is due to the care homes having significant outbreaks prohibiting vaccinations. The situation within each of these care homes are being closely monitored and bookings for vaccinations will take place as soon as appropriate to do so. 88% of residents and 78% of staff have been vaccinated.
- The local vaccination programme is following the JCVI national priority list for vaccinations.
- All groups in the top priority four priority groups identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisation (JCVI) will be offered a vaccine by the 15th February. The top four priority groups include:
  - all residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
  - all those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
  - all those 75 years of age and over
  - all those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals

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There will be a small number of people within priority groups will not be able to be offered a vaccine due to being tested positive for COVID-19. A period of 28 days is required between testing positive and vaccination. All those who have been unable to receive their vaccination due to being tested positive within the last 28 days, will be offered a vaccination as soon as appropriate.

## 2. **QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD** **Re: schools and digital access**

How many children and young people in the Devon County Council area are without access to a digital service?

- When will all of Devon be fully digitalized?
- How many children in the Devon County Council area are without an affordable data connection?
- How many children and young people in the Devon County Council area are without access to a computer?
- How many computers have been issued in the DCC area so far during the pandemic to home schooled pupils and students?
- How many children and young people are sharing devices?
- How many children and young people are using mobile phones to access remote learning?
- How much would it cost to provide every child with a computer?
- What work is being done to action these matters with central government?

## **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

We do not have specific data to address the questions raised regarding digital services available to children or provide detailed information on the affordability of either of these types of services to homeowners. We can comment on the degree of connectivity across both fixed broadband and mobile coverage and highlight areas where connectivity is poorest. We have also set out how this information relates to deprivation levels to show the correlation between the two.

There are pockets of poorer broadband connectivity across the whole of Devon due to the way the market has chosen to build out its infrastructure. The Connecting Devon and Somerset Programme funded in part by the County Council, has sought to target the hardest to reach areas through its subsidised broadband contracts. The programme has already delivered 154,000 homes with improved broadband who are able to access services of at least 30 Mbps. The recently signed new contracts with Airband will serve an additional 25,000 premises complementing the 16,000 homes being upgraded already in North Western Devon and 5000 properties within Exmoor and Dartmoor National Parks.

Government has defined “decent” broadband as a service in excess of 10Mbps download speeds. This would provide a homeowner the ability to participate in online lessons from two devices simultaneously. Ofcom’s Spring 2020 Connected Nations report provides a breakdown at a district and unitary

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authority level that highlights our rural districts as having more homes without a 10 Mbps service. The CDS programme will reduce these percentages over time.

| Local Authority | % of premises unable to receive 10Mbit/s |
|-----------------|--|
| WEST DEVON      | 11.8                                     |
| TORRIDGE        | 11.4                                     |
| MID DEVON       | 10.6                                     |
| SOUTH HAMS      | 7.2                                      |
| NORTH DEVON     | 7  |
| EAST DEVON      | 5.3                                      |
| TEIGNBRIDGE     | 3.7                                      |
| EXETER          | 1.6                                      |

It is worth highlighting that the sub-15Mbps and Ofcom 10Mbps data quoted above represents the physical availability of infrastructure to premises across Devon. This will be different to what residents have chosen to purchase from internet service providers, either because they are unaware of a better service being available, or because they have chosen to go with a lower-priced offering (for example a copper rather than a fibre-based service).

Connection to the internet via a mobile phone utilising the 4G network has the potential for a fair number of the places with low broadband connections to be able to access online services. The DfE is providing support for pupils whose families cannot afford increased data charges. They are also providing 4G dongles with funded contracts for households where there is no current internet access. Information on both these schemes is available here - [Increasing data allowances on mobile devices to support disadvantaged children.](#)

It should however be noted that during the lockdown **children without access to the internet are eligible to attend school when they would otherwise access online lessons.**

It is difficult to say what speeds could be achieved over 4G, as the nature of 4G means the speed will dynamically adjust depending on the number of users off the mast. However, in general, rural areas tend to be able to receive far higher 4G speeds compared to urban locations. Affordability and use of mobile data is harder to determine with any accuracy. However, the main mobile network operators now offer unlimited data services for less than £35 a month. 4G can provide speeds in excess of 20Mbps. Not all networks will cover all areas. Ofcom data on 4G coverage based on one operator and where there is choice is set out below:

| Local Authority | % Rural Outdoor 4G Coverage |                    |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
|                 | At least 1 4G provider      | All 4 4G providers |
| West Devon      | 92                          | 61                 |
| Teignbridge     | 93                          | 64                 |
| North Devon     | 95                          | 64                 |
| South Hams      | 96                          | 73                 |

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|            |     |     |
|------------|-----|-----|
| Mid Devon  | 96  | 68  |
| Torrige    | 97  | 60  |
| East Devon | 99  | 87  |
| Exeter     | 100 | 100 |

Ofcom are aware of the large disparity between coverage from at least one operator, and all operators. This is why they have recently agreed the Shared Rural Network approach as suggested by the four main operators. This should help leverage greater mast sharing of both existing and planned mobile masts, and thus help reduce this disparity as well as increasing mobile coverage more generally UK wide. The County Council is also exploring with Network Rail how trackside masts might be able to expand mobile coverage working with the Peninsula Rail Task Force.

There is a strong correlation between poor connectivity and the barriers and access to services (part of the indices of multiple deprivation data sets). Many rural areas of Devon perform particularly poorly on this element of deprivation, which is an issue for those households in more rural areas on lower incomes. Torrige and West Devon, which have the highest proportion of premises unable to access 10Mbps connections, perform relatively poorly in terms of overall deprivation and particularly on barriers to services. Some localities in West Devon being within the most deprived 1% of communities in England in terms of access to services.

To support children's access to online learning the DfE has also made available more than 1.3 million devices (laptops/ Chromebooks or tablets) to support the following groups of young people to access their education.

- Disadvantaged\* children in years 3 to 11 who do not have access to a device and whose face-to-face education is disrupted.
- Children in any year group who have been advised to shield because they (or someone they live with) are clinically extremely vulnerable.
- Disadvantaged\* children in any year group attending a hospital school.
- Disadvantaged\* children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- Disadvantaged children in the context above are those with:
  - **with no digital devices in their household**
  - **whose only available device is a smartphone**
  - **with a single device in their household that's being shared with more than one other family members.**

The number of devices schools can request however is determined by the DfE and this is sometimes not enough to meet demand. Therefore, a number of schemes have been set up by local community groups and businesses to provide additional laptops to schools who can then provide them to the families who need them. The BBC also has its ["make a difference give a laptop appeal"](#).

In Devon in the summer term 2020 approximately 2250 devices were provided to the LA and schools to support vulnerable children and those in year 10 (14 to 15-year old's).

In this academic year, to date, a further 8,000 (approx.) devices have been provided to disadvantaged children as defined above.

It is not possible to say at a county level how many children remain without a device or are using a mobile phone to access lessons. However, based on the above allocations it is unlikely that this still affects a large number of children. The number of pupils sharing devices is however likely to be much higher, however schools offer a range of ways to access home learning and not all of this is live lessons or online.

While parents, carers and pupils cannot apply for digital devices or support to access the internet through these schemes themselves, they can contact their school to discuss support to access remote education if it is still required.

In Devon there are 94,000 children of statutory school age in state funded education. If you said the cost of a laptop could be acquired for £300 then this would cost approximately £28 million.

While the government provision has been laid above, we know that this still leaves some children without the level of access to the internet or a device that would be ideal and we continue to raise this as a concern. The DfE have however recently allocated more funding so that additional devices can be allocated to schools over the course of the Spring term.

### **3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR WRIGHT Re: Rebuild Funding Programme**

Will the Cabinet Member for Education be writing to the Secretary of State for Education to express his disappointment that despite considerable need in Devon, the government has not selected any school in the county for its latest rebuild funding programme?

### **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR McINNES**

Whilst I am disappointed that Devon did not benefit from the recent Schools Rebuilding Programme announcement, Devon has benefitted from previous Government programmes in recent years. This includes ten new replacement schools and significant investment in two secondary schools under the previous Rebuilding Programme, as well as a number of Free Schools including a new Special School in Newton Abbot which opened recently.

The Government has prioritised the first round of this new programme towards buildings of specific construction types that require replacement and those with the highest condition based on data collected by the Department for Education. I note the Government intends to consult on the future waves of the school rebuilding programme and I, in consultation with DCC officers, will fully engage in that process rather than challenge the current decision making which is based on the collection and prioritisation of data nationally.

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I appreciate the latest decision will be disappointing for a number of schools in Devon but highlights the need to continue to find local deliverable solutions

## 4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR WRIGHT

### Re: Response to Council Motion on Black Lives Matter Campaign

Despite chasing, Devon County Council appears not to have had a response from ministers about the motion agreed on 1 October last year, which included writing to the Secretary of State for Education urging him to encourage schools to:

- i) Capture the voice of children and young people and their responses to the Black Lives Matter movement;
- ii) Ensure that the school environment and curriculum allows all students to see themselves reflected and included; and,
- iii) Reflect on how they challenge historic and persisting racist ideas and to how they celebrate diversity.

Does the Cabinet Member think it is acceptable for ministers to ignore Devon County Council on such an important subject?

## REPLY BY COUNCILLOR McINNES

It is disappointing that a response from the Secretary of State has not been received but regardless of this in Devon we have moved forward the educational aspects in line with the motion agreed at council. In addition to the work already in place before the council meeting, Education teams and schools have been:

- Developing their curriculum to challenge historic and persisting racist ideas & celebrate the diversity in Devon.
- Increasing awareness and sensitivity to what racism looks like in Devon and how we can all challenge racism.
- Ensuring that race equality policies are shared (& updated) regularly by schools, parents, children.
- Appealing to school's pragmatic motives (Ofsted/the law) and their principled motives (equipping all young people with an appropriate education, free from racist myths and to provide a safe and affirming educational experience for minority ethnic pupils).

Additionally, we have 8 bi-lingual support workers who have been incredibly active during the lockdown, supporting children and families and providing support in accessing the curriculum and even the school itself.

(Please see attached letter sent to the Secretary of State).

## 5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BRAZIL

### Re: Second and Holiday Homes

Will Devon County Council immediately lobby government to close the loophole that allows domestic properties to switch to business rates and then pay nothing by claiming the small business exemption. And also, lobby to allow local

authorities to be permitted to charge up to 200% on second/holiday homes in their area?

If both of these policies were implemented how much extra revenue would this generate for DCC?

## **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART**

I am happy to continue to lobby Government on the issue of second homes not being able to be switched to business rates. We have done this a number of times in the past and taken the issue up with our Devon MPs; Anthony Mangnall has even asked questions in the House of Commons on this issue. I am also aware that Councillor Brazil has raised this question at a recent webinar with the Minister. I think what was clear from the discussion that ensued, particularly on the Chat, was that this is a national issue for Councils with Coasts and National Parks, and not just a Devon issue.

In light of that, I am of the view that we need take the issue up with both the Local Government Association and County Council Networks. The Minister's view that it would be difficult to differentiate between the Business and the Claimed business could be overcome by either changing the criteria to say that the property has to be Used not just available for so many days a year or maybe a tax return showing the income generated.

I am not so sure of a charge of 200%, with the current business rates loophole we risk driving more second homeowners in this direction. I would prefer to get the law changed so that Local Government gets the Council Tax. For some years the Second Home Owner has paid nothing as the Government has paid the Business Rates for Properties/ Businesses with a rateable value which started at £5000 I think and now is somewhat higher.

This Business rate money is collected by the District Councils and then split into 9% for County Councils, 1% for the Fire Authority, 40% to District Councils and the remaining 50% goes to back to Government. Had it been Council Tax, 72% comes to the County Council, about 10% to the collecting District Council, 11% to Police and about 3% to the Parish or Town Council.

In terms of the revenue generated, we do not hold this information as the Districts only provide the Gross and Net Tax Base in its totality and the information on second homes is not readily available. The census data would not be reliable for this purpose.

## **6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ACKLAND**

**Re: care package funds**

When receiving a financial assessment for her husband's care package, one of my residents informed me that included in the package was encouragement to use a particular form for employer's insurance when using personal assistants. When the document came, she discovered that Devon County Council is

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encouraging use of a firm based in the UK but using policies based in a bank in China. The firm confirmed to my resident that all their insurance policies (car, home etc) are with China. Does Devon County Council realise they are regularly encouraging vulnerable people to send tax payers' care package money to a bank in China?

## **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER**

The provider in question is one of our Employer's Liability Insurance providers called Mark Bates Ltd.

We signpost people to either Mark Bates Ltd or Fish Insurance if they are not sure where to find their own Employer's Liability insurance when employing a personal assistant (PA) using Direct Payments. They are both UK-based insurance providers and Mark Bates Ltd works with every Local Authority in the UK.

Mark Bates Ltd is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, with their insurance policies underwritten by China Taiping Insurance (UK) Co Ltd. China Taiping is a member of the British Insurers Association, regulated by both the Financial Conduct Authority and Prudential Regulation Authority in the UK to underwrite general insurance policies.

## **7. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR WHITTON**

### **Re: Use of Pesticides**

The government has recently launched a public consultation on pesticides. Until now, the UK government has kept its promise to ban bee-killers in the light of the clear scientific conclusion that neonic pesticides leach toxins into the environment, and poison bees.

It is now understood that big pesticide companies are lobbying hard to undermine the ban. If they are successful toxic neonic pesticides will soon be back in widespread use to the detriment of fragile eco-systems.

Can the cabinet member reassure members that the council will respond to the consultation and that it will condemn the reintroduction of pesticides that harm bees?

## **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD**

Officers are currently looking at the Consultation on the 'Revised National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (Plant Protection Products)' with the intention of making a response.

[Consultation on the 'Revised National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides \(Plant Protection Products\)' \(defra.gov.uk\)](https://www.defra.gov.uk/pesticides/consultation)

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The three most commonly used neonic insecticides were banned entirely for agricultural use in 2018 by the EU, a decision that the UK government then supported. The government recently granted a 2021 derogation for farmers to use one of these neonics on sugar beet seed to protect crops from a virus that has significantly reduced yields. As part of our response to the consultation we will be looking at the scientific evidence that the Government is taking to the use of pesticides and this decision in particular.

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Councillor James McInnes  
Cabinet Member for Children Services and Schools

Gavin Williamson  
Secretary of State for Education  
House of Commons  
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29 October 2020

Dear Mr Williamson

I am writing to you following a recent meeting of Devon County Council which was addressed by students representing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in our area.

They spoke very eloquently about their experiences growing up in a largely rural county and my fellow councillors asked me to write to you about areas in which the Government could be pro-active, particularly in light of the Black Lives Matter movement.

My council has been reviewing our support and has identified a number of actions for us to take locally. For example, we have been liaising with Dr Ghee Bowman at Exeter University who is managing a project on Devon's multi-cultural history.

It is his aim to produce a resource pack for use across various key stages in Devon's primary and secondary schools.

<https://www.tellingourstoriesdevon.org.uk>

However, the point of my letter is to ask you if the Government will also take action nationally and urge schools to:

- \* Capture the voice of children and young people and their responses to the Black Lives Matter movement.
- \* Ensure that the school environment and curriculum allows all students to see themselves reflected and included.
- \* Reflect on how they challenge historic and persisting racist ideas and how they celebrate diversity.

My council believes these actions would certainly help to develop a more understanding and inclusive society that promotes racial equality for everyone.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James McInnes".

James McInnes