

**Report of the Cabinet Member for  
Community, Public Health, Transportation and Environmental Services**

**Introduction**

I have been asked to report to Council by Members as follows:

1. by Councillor Hannaford on the work being done locally to ensure the vaccine confidence campaign is accessible to people with disabilities, learning disabilities, special needs, and those who do not have English as their first language
2. by Councillor Hannaford on the changes to DWP for disabled people:

A two-year ban on severely disabled benefit claimants being moved to Universal Credit has now been lifted. Charities have raised fears for 500,000 disabled people as this a major change to benefit rules. This means people on the old-style benefits can now choose to move to the new UC if they want to. But some will also be moved without choosing to if they have a “change of circumstances”, like moving house or a relationship. Charities say some people may end up worse off in the change - despite ministers insisting the majority will benefit. SDP claimants who move to UC get monthly transition payments of £120, £285 or £405 - but these will be eroded over time. They will be chipped away if a claimant is awarded a new or larger element of any part of their UC, apart from childcare. That suggests many will find it impossible to be certain how much money they will receive into the future.

In January 2019 ministers blocked SDP claimants from moving to Universal Credit after two men who were switched over and lost out launched a High Court challenge. This block was called the ‘SDP gateway’. Since then the government have introduced transition payments, but campaigners say this system does not go far enough. Scope say EDPs are swallowed up in the new system without dedicated transition payments.

Do we know how many people in the DCC area are potentially affected by these changes? What work is being done with our clients to inform them and ensure that they are not losing vital financial support ?

3. by Councillor Hannaford on Farming Faces Mental Health Crisis:

This year, the Farm Safety Foundation’s annual Mind Your Head week (10-14 February) raised awareness of the link between poor mental health and farm safety. Mental health issues among farmers are of increasing concern. Some 84% of farmers under 40 believe mental

health is the biggest danger facing the industry – up from 81% in 2018, according to the Farm Safety Foundation. Farming continues to have the poorest safety record of any UK occupation – and 85% of young farmers believe mental health is linked to the overall safety of farms. Using official figures the report said that there were 83 suicides in 2018 among people working in agriculture and the related trades in England and Wales. Threats to mental health included “smiling depression”, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loneliness, rural isolation and mental health particularly in younger farmers.

The farming industry faces many critical stress factors, which were placing increasing pressures on workers and putting them at greater risk of mental ill health, it said. These include extended amounts of time working in isolation, a blurring between work and home life, and financial uncertainty from changing consumer habits, the pandemic, economic downturn, climate crisis, and new EU trade rules.

Total income in the UK from farming fell by £971m between 2017 and 2018, and 42% of UK farmers would have made a loss between 2014 and 2017 without direct payments. The foundation added it is vital to build a culture within agriculture that explicitly recognises how the job can effect on the wellbeing of farmers and their families.

Can the cabinet member please report to council what work we are doing with our tenant farmers, and generally how can we work with the Farm Safety Foundation, the National Farmers Union, charities and the wider agricultural community to raise awareness, understanding and promote more help and support on these important issues.

4. by Councillor Wright on progress on the actions resulting from the 10-point green action plan.
5. by Councillor Wright on the take up by communities and activity relating to the wildflower verge project, launched last year.

## **Response**

### **1. Vaccine Confidence Programme**

NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group have undertaken a significant piece of engagement with people who have learning disabilities and also people from our BAME communities to understand how we can support uptake of the vaccine with these groups.

The feedback has been shared nationally with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and will be informing a national approach to reaching vulnerable and hard to reach groups.

An example of some of the things that the NHS are doing locally to support inclusivity of the vaccination programme include:

- Ensuring the dissemination of the nationally produced Easy Read information leaflet about the vaccine
- Launching a campaign to encourage everyone, particularly those from vulnerable and or hard to reach groups are registered with a GP practice – working with local partners (Hikmat and Living Options) to ensure this reaches our most vulnerable communities
- A specific vaccinations inequalities group as been developed, lead by the Devon Public Health Team, to ensure vulnerable groups are supported to receive the vaccine
- Based on the engagement findings, the CCG plan to develop some case study videos of people who have learning disabilities that can be used as part of the uptake campaign with these groups
- The CCG are also working with the NHSE/I regional team on developing videos in different languages to support our BAME communities

## **2. Changes to DWP for disabled people**

Severe Disability Premium (SDP) is an extra amount that is included in some means-tested benefits to help with the cost of disability. It does not have a directly equivalent allowance in Universal Credit.

SDP recipients will only need to make a Universal Credit claim if they have a relevant change of circumstances, in the same way as other claimants on legacy benefits. They will remain on legacy benefits until either they have such a change of circumstances or are moved to Universal Credit as part of “managed migration”.

People moving to Universal Credit may be able to get ‘transitional protection’ as an extra payment to help with the move.

The Department of Work and Pensions cannot quantify how many people in the DCC area are potentially affected by this change.

The County Council is not involved in the administration of these benefits and does not offer financial advice, although this is available through commissioned services including the Citizens Advice Bureau.

## **3. Farming Faces Mental Health Crisis**

Devon, Somerset & Torbay Trading Standards have been working closely with partners to highlight the importance of mental health and wellbeing in the farming community. The work stems from an increasing number of trading standards investigations where the mental health of the farmer is a prime concern and often a contributory factor.

On more than one occasion, officers have responded to animal health & welfare incidents and reported concerns involving the mental health and welfare of the farmer. This has led to sensitive conversations with family members, making referrals to local GP surgeries, working with Adult Social Services teams and charities such as the Farm Community Network (FCN). Providing farmers with support and valuable signposting to support services aims to improve compliance, help the farmer and overall, the business.

Last year, the service made mental health in farming a priority area and set out a project with the aim of raising awareness of mental health illness and signposting rural business communities to support services.

The project has been delivered in two distinct strands;

- 1) Raising awareness and building greater business engagement through the 'Trading Standards Farming Partnership' (membership of which includes the NFU, APHA and a variety of farming commercial interests such as market livestock operators), the Farming Community Network and Public Health.

This was achieved from hosting two live webinar events (a third webinar is due later this month) Featuring speakers from FCN, Young Farmers, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution and an NHS GP. Each organisation focussed on the importance of mental health and wellbeing, highlighting what help is available and where to get support. This project task aimed at helping rural businesses by highlighting the stigma surrounding mental health and publicising the support and guidance available. Webinars were recorded and placed on Youtube the following week.

<https://youtu.be/pUtmx9cqYOE>  
[https://youtu.be/S\\_ZzsoW-13A](https://youtu.be/S_ZzsoW-13A)

As an aside, officers have also been providing mental health signposting information as part of the Bovine TB Advice Pack from last year's project. The pack includes important information about the charity organisation, FCN and important signposting to mental health and other support services. Approximately 200 advice packs have been distributed so far.

- 1) Twelve Trading Standards Officers also received mental health 'first aid' training to improve the direct support they can offer rural businesses. The training was delivered by MHFA England (Mental Health First Aid), and equipped officers with the skills and confidence they need to help business owners during the course of their work and also support their own personal wellbeing.

The universal offers (including to DCC Farm tenants) have been widely advertised including press releases and promotion on local radio. Overall, attendance levels at the webinars have been extremely pleasing.

Specifically in relation to DCC Farm tenants on the County Farms estate, farm safety awareness, including mental health issues, has been promoted amongst Devon County Farms Estate tenants through the Farms Estate newsletter, in particular

promoting farm safety week and making tenants aware of the Farm Safety Foundation Charity [www.yellowwellies.org](http://www.yellowwellies.org). The land agents have a good working relationship with the Farming Community Network and have signposted some tenants to the Charity to seek help and support.

In more recent times, all tenants that have been directly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic were contacted by the land agents to talk and listen and identify help and support they may need. The land agent team kept in regular contact with the worst affected tenants and have provided signposting to tenants for guidance, support and grant or loan schemes available at the time.

#### **4. 10-point green action plan**

The Environment pages of the Devon County Council website give a regular update on the Environmental Performance of the Council.

[Environmental performance progress - Environment \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/environmental-performance-progress)

The highlight report tracks the progress by way of a Red, Amber, Green rating every 3 months. It is currently up to date to the end of January 2021.

#### **5. Wild Flower Verge Policy**

There have been ongoing enquiries from parish councils and volunteer groups in managing their road verges for wildlife. Over the last year a number of online meetings with local councils have taken place.

We are currently working with over 30 parishes across Devon who are either going to manage verges directly using volunteers or hire a contractor to manage on their behalf.

Under the umbrella of the Devon Local Nature Partnership we are currently working with partners (including the Devon Association of Local Councils) to set up an ecological support network for parish and town councils and for other community wildlife groups. Promotion of the wildflower verge project will be part of this work.

#### **Councillor Roger Croad**

Cabinet Member for Community, Public Health, Transportation and Environmental Services