

**Report of the Cabinet Member for
Public Health, Communities and Equality**

Introduction

I will be reporting as follows for Full Council on 2 December 2021:

1. by Councillor Atkinson as follows:

The NAO report of 19th November found:

- The government was not fully prepared for the wide-ranging impacts that this pandemic had on society, the economy and essential public services. The 2019 Assessment recognised that an influenza-type pandemic could have extensive non-health impacts, including on communications, education, energy supplies, finance, food supplies and transport services. The government lacked detailed plans for several aspects of its response to COVID-19, including shielding, employment support schemes and managing the disruption to schooling (paragraph 3.12).
- The Cabinet Office told us that, as the pandemic started, the government's risk appetite changed, and it lowered the threshold for the health and societal impacts of the pandemic that it deemed acceptable (paragraph 3.7)
- A cross-government review of pandemic planning arrangements found that most plans were inadequate to meet the demands of any actual incident..... The then Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government told us that, while its liaison officers support and challenge local resilience forums, their role is obtaining reassurance rather than formal assurance over local resilience forums' readiness for emergencies (paragraphs 3.13 to 3.15)
- Prior to the pandemic, the government did not act upon some warnings about the UK's lack of preparedness from its past pandemic simulations. The government has taken forward many lessons learned from actual incidents and simulation exercises.

In view of the above conclusion can the Cabinet members for health community and economy report on the effect of government failures highlighted by this report has been on Devon's health economy and resilience forum and the lessons for local government in Devon and government?

Response

The Council, having supported its communities and businesses through the Pandemic, fully recognises the health, and socio-economic impact of the pandemic on Devon. The Council has constantly reviewed its response to see how services and resilience can be improved in the future. We are proud of our officers and our communities in the way they have gone above and beyond to provide support to the most vulnerable during this time. We have played an active part in the local resilience forum and are proud of our partners particularly the Voluntary and Community Sector who have worked with us shoulder to shoulder.

An outcome of our review, our search for continuous improvement and preparedness to future incidents is set out in the Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 that has been presented to Council for approval today. It sets out how we have learnt lessons from the pandemic and will help build on the resilience of local people and communities to create a fairer, healthier and more caring place.

The pandemic has had an impact on the Devon economy, similarly to much of country, with some key headlines including:

- Across the Devon County Council area we have noted that in the period between December 2019 and June 2021 30,400 people aged 50+ exited from our labour market. Some of this is due to demographics and an ageing population, with many people reaching retirement age. More significantly, however, in the aged 50-64 age group 13,100 have become economically inactive over the same period pointing to a jump in the number of people retiring early, or considering their options for the future linked to the pandemic.
- Early indications are that recruitment into lower paid care roles is currently proving difficult. Pre-pandemic there were a significant number of vacancies in the care sector in Devon and vacancies have risen since then.
- a lack of available long-term residential lets in many towns in Devon, especially focused in our coastal areas, is believed to be further impacting on the ability of employers in all sectors, including care, to recruit in these localities.
- We have seen employees on pay roll increase to levels higher than before the pandemic, but numbers of self-employed fall. At the same time universal credit figures remain higher than before the pandemic, signalling an increasing number of 'working poor' and when coupled with increased levels of house hold debt for some, rising cost pressures there is an heightened concern we will see more people falling into need for support and help.

Councillor Roger Croad

Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality