

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
Wednesday 9 September 2020

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE
Re: Flooding in Barnstaple and Highways Drains

I assume the Cabinet Member holder as now been briefed on the extent of the flash flooding in Barnstaple earlier in August?

I appreciate that Barnstaple was not the only community to suffer but it does seem to me that Barnstaple suffered more than most. Can I make clear to the Cabinet Member that I do not believe that the cause of the flooding was simply due to drains not being cleaned. The volume of water simply overwhelmed the existing drains.

Therefore can the Cabinet Member firstly say what remedial work as been undertaken since to firstly ensure that all highways drains have been cleaned again secondly have all drains been inspected to ensure that older drains have not been blocked by collapsed interiors, thirdly have the drainage flaps to the river Taw been inspected to ensure they are functioning correctly.

The Cabinet Member will doubtless recall that when I led the County Council, I introduced a policy that capital monies were made available to improve drain capacity at locations prone to flooding. I appreciate that cuts in government funding has made it hard to do as much to extend this policy as we all would like. Nevertheless, I would urge the County Council to take urgent steps to increase investment in drain capacity improvements.

I hope the Cabinet Member would support this objective and also make improving drain capacity in Barnstaple a significant priority. The town cannot suffer a repeat of the flooding experienced in Barnstaple last month or the traffic problems that resulted from the flash flooding.

I hope that in responding to the points in my question the portfolio holder will agree to bring a report to Cabinet setting out what he plans he has to give greater protection to Barnstaple from flash flooding?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The torrential downpours in Barnstaple led to EA river gauges along Coney Gut, which runs through the centre of Barnstaple, reaching near record levels. Unfortunately, much of our highway drainage infrastructure out falls into the Coney Gut, and other water ways, and therefore had its discharge capacity restricted resulting in it becoming overwhelmed.

Gullies in the town are generally cleaned on a 3 yearly basis in line with our county wide urban gully cleaning policy. The area most affected by the storms, was last cleaned earlier this year. In response to the storm, we are currently cleaning all gullies in the affected parts of the town, to clear anything that may have been washed into the system. A CCTV camera survey of the drainage in the square has been commissioned and will be carried out this week.

Officers based in Barnstaple report that the system was overwhelmed within minutes and once the storm passed only took approximately an hour for the flooding to subside, indicating that the system is working well.

A Flood Investigation Report is being produced. Once this is available, I will discuss the contents of the report with the Cabinet Member for Community, Public Health, Transportation and Environmental Services to decide on the appropriate course of action.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE
Re: Covid 19 Test and Trace System

I emailed the Leader a few weeks ago asking him to consider following the example of other local authorities in stepping forward to help deliver a Covid 19 test and trace system that delivers results given the stumbling efforts by the national system to deliver led by an inadequate Tory Peer.

Thus far I have not received any reply from the Leader.

Will he please give my suggestion that DCC should step up to the plate and help give our residents a quality test and trace system to help improve Devon's response to Covid 19?

He may wish to read the article in the most recent Local Government First magazine reporting on the efforts some local authorities are making in this regard.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

Can I first offer my apologies to Councillor Greenslade.

Currently some local authorities are piloting local contact tracing services (for example Swindon) but the approach in Devon has been to second three members of its public health team part-time to Public Health England to support their contact tracing, which is working well.

At present, the national NHS led Test & Trace system is performing well for Devon. For Devon, since its launch to 16th August, 86% of people were reached by Test & Trace which is one of the best in the country (15th out of 150 nationally), and 68% of close contacts were identified (21st out of 150 nationally). These rates have improved locally and nationally in recent weeks, so the figures for Devon will be higher again although they are not available

yet. Complex cases are referred to the Public Health England Local Health Protection Team for follow-up: they are currently reaching 100% of cases.

There have been some recent problems with access to COVID-19 testing. This is not unique to Devon and is a result of national laboratory capacity being stretched and having to prioritise analysing tests for areas with a higher prevalence of COVID-19 cases. We have put additional local arrangements in place to boost local testing availability until national capacity can be increased. We are asking Devon residents to book a test as normal via the [government website](#). However, if they are unable to book a local slot then they can email d-ccg.devon.urgenttesting@nhs.net and they will be supported to access local testing. We are also reiterating messaging that individuals should only get tested if they have symptoms of coronavirus, outside of any asymptomatic testing programmes, and that care homes remain a top priority for testing.