

Service Delivery for Planning, Transportation and Environment, Communities, and Economy, Enterprise and Skills: In-Year Briefing

Briefing Paper by the Chief Officer for Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity

1. Introduction

This mid-year report for Scrutiny covers the functions of Planning, Transportation and Environment (Head of Service: Dave Black), Communities (Head of Service: Simon Kitchen), and Economy, Enterprise and Skills (Head of Service: Keri Denton).

2. Planning, Transportation and Environment - Head of Service: Dave Black

Even though the work environment has been difficult, good progress has been made on projects so far this year. Transport Co-ordination has been the most affected area. The bus network has been massively affected. The current situation is that service levels have returned to near normal, but patronage is running at about 60% of pre COVID levels. This is largely due to the restrictions in place due to social distancing and the reduced need to travel, for example to access work. The effect of this on operating costs is that there is a need for a large government grant to make up for the shortfall in revenue to keep the services running at current levels.

School transport has been running successfully albeit with a complex combination of dedicated school buses and public transport supported by duplicate buses where there isn't enough safe capacity. There is also an additional extra government grant for school transport. The number of people using the National Bus Pass on buses has reduced significantly. Government guidance is expected soon for any knock-on effect on budgets for both Devon and the bus operators in 2021/22. Community Transport has weathered the storm and is back operating more or less as before COVID which is a real positive and demonstrates the importance of the support it receives. Staff running the system have enthusiastically managed and continue manage the evolving situation admirably.

Key projects to improve flood risk resilience have or are in the process of being delivered at: Ivybridge, Stokeinteignhead, Sidmouth, Exeter, Ugborough, Cullompton, Ottery St Mary, South Pool. The total cost of the nine projects is £2.5m made up of a cocktail of funding from Defra, Local Levy, Exeter City Council, and approximately £1m from Devon. The result is approximately 250 properties have improved flood resilience.

The School Place Planning Team have delivered (or onsite) several expansion projects plus a new school at Glendinning Special School, Newton Abbot. Work with the Department for Education has resulted in two new schools under construction at Roundswell, Barnstaple and Monkerton, Exeter. In addition, a programme is emerging to provide additional Special Schools places. Planning permission has just been approved to progress a new school in Okehampton and expansion of Orchard Manor, Dawlish. Admissions for September 2020 resulted in 97% of children in their choice of school.

Work on the planning and delivery of major housing growth areas continues. Some funding is available for this work from Homes England in the form of capacity building and Homes Infrastructure Fund, notably South West Exeter, Culm Garden Village, Cullompton Relief Road, Tiverton Extension, Westacott Barnstaple and Dawlish. There continues to be considerable progress on the long-term developments of Sherford and Cranbrook.

During the pandemic there are record numbers of people to walking and cycling as part of their daily routines. In addition, there is advice not to use public transport, particularly where buses are well used and there are opportunities to walk or cycle. As a result, Government made a small amount of money available for emergency "pop-up" temporary cycle and pedestrian measures to improve safety and social distancing. A range of measures have taken place across the County although the majority were in Exeter where there was greatest opportunity. Detailed evaluation and consultation are now taking place on the "pop-up" measures and recommendations will be made to HATOCs. It is anticipated that further modest government funding will enable more permanent works.

Work is also progressing on a series of local schemes with the opening of Sherford Main Street and the new Exeter Science Park - Park & Ride, Moor Lane junction and Exeter cycle route through Whipton. The first phase of the A382 between Newton Abbot and Drumbridges will open soon and a bid is in for further phases. The two government funded safety schemes in north and south Devon are progressing, albeit the one in north Devon is awaiting confirmation of funding. The Full Business Case for the North Devon Link Road improvement was submitted on programme and we are awaiting a decision.

The Devon Climate Emergency project has continued to perform despite COVID. The Response Group of senior officers from 27 organisations has met monthly. The volunteer Net-Zero Task Force has steered the drafting of an Interim Carbon Plan that is due for public consultation for 10 weeks from the 7th December 2020. The Citizens' Assembly, which will test the public's appetite for addressing the more controversial issues, has been moved online and is likely to occur in July 2021. Its findings will be used to update the Interim Carbon Plan into a final version. The Climate Impacts Group has expanded its remit beyond Devon to develop a Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Climate Adaptation Plan. It is now chaired by the regional director of the Environment Agency. The collation of climate risks for public health, the natural environment, water and flooding, and society and economy is nearing completion. Gaps in our

readiness for these risks will begin to be identified, which will form the basis of the adaptation plan.

We continue to maintain our core environmental services relating to the conservation of Devon's natural and historic environment. Our success in working with partners and drawing-in of external funding massively extends the scale and scope of our influence. Highlights include continuing to work with and support the Local Nature Partnership, North Devon Biosphere and the five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We have also been proactive in the Saving Devon's Treescapes project to tackle ash dieback and involvement in a new externally funded project promoting our maritime heritage.

In terms of budget, the service is reporting an underspend which is predominantly attributed to the lower patronage of the concessionary travel. Other areas of the service are more or less on target for a balanced budget with relatively small fluctuations due to the impact of COVID.

3. Communities - Head of Service: Simon Kitchen

Inevitably, given the focus, reach and commissioning influence of the Communities team, key aspects of the Council's response and learning in relation to COVID-19 has been led from within this function; utilising its relationships with key partners and organisations.

From the start of the financial year the team has developed and maintained strong partnerships with district councils, town and parish councils and a range of community and voluntary groups and organisations. In putting in place critical infrastructure and support, the team have played an important part in the remarkable community response witnessed within the first 'phase' across Devon. The team quickly responded to the needs of the national Shielding programme, helping to support 34,000 citizens in Devon, including the direct delivery of food to over 7,000 and support and advice to many more.

Having developed strong networks in central government, the team facilitated the development of a bespoke IT system to manage 'Shielding' local data; provided direct funding to a range of infrastructure organisations supporting local response, set up a helpline and support response for local councils and rapidly developed and deployed funding streams to facilitate small and medium investment in hundreds of emerging and established community responses (£400k).

In developing and facilitating a Team Devon approach with district councils the Council collectively developed a co-ordinated infrastructure of support to the most vulnerable across the county, which included the redeployment of some DCC staff to other councils. This reflected a huge undertaking across our key partners alongside what is recognised as an extraordinary community and voluntary sector response. Team Devon arrangements have continued, and work has included the development of shared arrangements to support those experiencing extreme financial hardship, utilising funding from the Council and Government (£1.7M). These arrangements continue to evolve.

The response has created a great deal of learning across organisations, particularly relating to the agility, leadership and innovation from the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors (VCSE). The Council has continued additional funding to support preparation for future response requirements but has also facilitated a VCSE group to explore wider opportunities including the potential opportunities in recovery for the sector and wider partners.

We continue to work across partners to plan and prepare for any future response and this has been captured in a *Community Support Plan* adopted by partners and recently exercised. In addition, a linked plan to support any national re-introduction to shielding has been developed alongside government, which has included work to implement a national data sharing system to transfer information in relation to those clinically extremely vulnerable. The Council and local partners recently contributed into a National Audit Office review of shielding (to be published in the new year) and reviewers commented on the strength of local partnerships and response. The Council's *Doing What Matters* and *Making the Connection* funding remains suspended pending any need to deploy funds in a further local outbreak, though this will be reviewed in the new year.

Despite the pandemic the team have continued to make significant progress in key areas, including across commissioned services. Following the award of contract after a rigorous and competitive procurement exercise, DYS Space have provided invaluable support to hundreds of young people since March, despite being unable to operate a centre-based model for some time. DYS Space quickly delivered, in partnership with the police and district councils, a targeted on-street service to work with young people reinforcing social distance awareness and to help young people in crisis. In addition, DYS Space enhanced their digital outreach work by developing an online Youth Centre offer enabling young people to remain in contact with youth support through a safe and secure platform alongside a virtual referral and 1:1 service for young people. This has been so successful that this model attracted £160k of additional National lottery funding to extend for the remainder of the year.

Libraries Unlimited stayed very much 'open for business' despite the closure of its buildings and again enhanced its digital offer seeing significant uptake in digital subscriptions and e-book borrowing. Library staff made hundreds of calls to many of its 'regular' customers, many of whom had felt isolated and lonely, and who found the contact invaluable. Whilst many areas of the country have still to re-open library services, Devon was one of the first areas to start to see libraries being re-opened, which were done so in a phased return. Libraries Unlimited piloted book deliveries and a click and collect service to maximise access to the book stock and the mobile libraries continue to operate a valuable service to the most rural areas of Devon.

Data quickly began to emerge in the early days of lockdown that more people were seeking support from domestic abuse services commissioned by the Council. The team were able to secure an additional £400k from emergency COVID-19 funding from government to bolster initial response support and

services, alongside employing additional roles within the Early Help arena to ensure early warning signs across families were picked up and appropriate support facilitated. In addition, the Council is co-producing a new relationship management tool/database which will enhance the capability and capacity of our front-line provider to record and track enquiries and cases, enabling better system join-up. The team are also seeking to create an additional temporary post to prepare the Council for the opportunities and additional statutory duties arising from the new Domestic Abuse Bill, given the importance of this agenda.

The Communities Team have worked closely with colleagues across the peninsula to secure £417,395 from the Home Office to identify and challenge perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse.

Active Devon continues its great work as a community-focused, non-profit organisation (hosted by DCC) dedicated to inspiring and supporting Devon to be active. Active Devon works closely with its key funder Sport England and is currently exploring the development of a separate entity element to allow the opportunity to generate income separate to the Council, in order to create greater sustainability for the sector.

In wider partnerships the team are leading work alongside Clinical Commissioning Groups and others to explore 'waste' and 'failure' in the way that services currently respond to people with complex needs and developing improved approaches to understanding people, their needs and how to better organise responses. The work is influencing the 'Inequalities' stream of the pandemic response planning. Work continues in partnership to develop responses around serious violence and radicalisation and the team has convened a Youth Crime Prevention working group with key partners to bring together key learning and approaches. The team led work for the Council to become 1 of 3 national leads, alongside Sport England, for an innovative pilot (working locally with CITY Community Trust) to support around 150 young people a year to improve outcomes around criminal justice and educational exclusion and attainment.

The team continue to explore opportunities to support the [five ways to wellbeing](#) in the Council's work contributing to promote Exeter UNESCO City of Literature status; the Villages in Action cultural programme; and the timely re-publication of Todd Gray's *Devon and the Slave Trade* which now includes a foreword from the Leader of DCC. The team were particularly proud to lead work resulting in the Council achieving Silver Status within the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme.

4. Economy, Enterprise and Skills - Head of Service: Keri Denton

The Economy, Enterprise and Skills Service has continued to support the local economy and respond to the significant economic consequences from COVID. It has continued to work with businesses, deliver skills and training opportunities, provided a range of regulatory services and guidance through the joint Devon, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards and progressed several

key infrastructure programmes. Set out below are some of the highlights and achievements:

The Service has established a Devon Economic Recovery Group, working with the private and public sector and published a Team Devon Economic Recovery Prospectus. This has included a programme of measures and support across four broad themes:

- Business and Sectors
- Employment and Skills
- Place and Communities and
- Opportunities.

An investment case has been made to Government to co-invest in an initial recovery programme and the Service has secured more than £10m capital funding from the Heart of the SW Local Enterprise Partnership for a range of projects across Devon under the Government's Getting Building Fund.

The Service has continued to deliver its primary adult and community learning programme through the year through Learn Devon, with 5,100 individuals engaged over the year, and around 1,000 enrolments alone to improve individual English and Maths performance. Despite a 15% drop in learner numbers due to COVID, attainment amongst core subjects remained strong across the year as the service shifted to a digital first approach. This included notable successes in our GCSE cohort, with 90% of candidates achieving a strong pass (compared to 78% nationally), and a significant increase in the number of individuals accessing a digital course (approximately 750 in 2019/20).

The Service has also continued the Council's Post 16 Transition programme, working with CSW Ltd to provide the Council's wraparound tracking and support provision for those young people moving from full time education into new opportunities. Tracking over 29,000 young people in Devon this year, including around 3,000 individuals with a barrier to learning or in need of specialist support, the service continued to provide a tailored service to those at risk of NEET. Despite the onset of COVID and historic changes in the condition of the labour market, NEET levels overall remained relatively low at around 5% as of September 2020, and actually saw a reduction in the level of those considered NEET amongst those either in or leaving care in the 16-19 age group due to cross organisational work on the issue.

Working with the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, the service also continued to lead upon a range of activity across the Skills and Employment agenda. This included the expansion of the HotSW Careers Hub to support every mainstream secondary school and college in the County from September 2020; project activity by the Digital Skills Partnership to support up to 750 individuals into new careers and to upskill; ongoing intelligence and analytical work with the University of Exeter around our local labour market and economy; and the securing of a further £3.5m of European funding to support up to 1,200 new training opportunities within Devon, Plymouth and Torbay across the Health and Social Care sector.

In response to COVID and the increasing number of redundancies the Service has put into place an Employment Support programme, working with Job centre Plus to support the upskilling of individuals at risk of redundancy, provide careers advice and support to finding new employment through a range of coaching and other support.

The Service is working through a range of projects to stimulate business growth and successfully securing external funding. The Service now delivers the Heart of the South West Growth Hub on behalf of the LEP (2,135 businesses supported), in addition to Growth Support Programme which delivered 3 and 12 hours of business support to 119 and 46 SME's respectively. Additional funding has been secured to support businesses respond to the pandemic and over 1800 applications were received for kickstart funding, from which 327 grants were awarded. Overall, the Service has supported 2,581 businesses across the HotSW area between April - September 2020.

The joint Devon, Somerset & Torbay Trading Standards Service continues to perform strongly, meeting key operational targets and carrying out some major investigations. The Service has also focused on prevention and business support. Examples include, a campaign to tackle financial scams with a specific focus on educating younger people who are increasingly becoming victims, a project developed in partnership with the Property Ombudsman to provide business support and interventions to all letting agents in our service delivery area.

The joint Trading Standards Service has continued to work innovatively throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and has ran highly successful online interventions on Mental Health in The Farming Community (working with partners to raise awareness of the issues and signposting farmers to practical support) and on Allergens in Food (advising local businesses of the issues and legal requirements and highlighting best practice). The Service has also been fully integrated with the work of the Devon Economic Recovery Group, developing its successful approved trader scheme, Buy With Confidence to incorporate a Made in Devon option for businesses who want to emphasise the local origin of their product or service as well as contributing to a number of other proposed initiatives.

The Service has led on the County Council's input in the Connecting Devon and Somerset programme which is successfully delivering new broadband services across North Western Devon. A procurement to appoint contractors to deliver gigabit capable broadband is underway and is on target to have new contracts in place by the end of December. The programme has also delivered and supported a range of community-led schemes and secured £1m capital funding from the LEP to deliver a Mobile Boost voucher programme to improve mobile phone connectivity.

The service has continued with development, management and marketing of its industrial estate portfolio, including at Okehampton East Business Park, Mullacott Cross Industrial Estate in Ilfracombe, Duchy Square in Princetown

and Roundswell South in Barnstaple. New developments are being taken forward at Skypark, and the Council has purchased the former Flybe Training Academy and will lease this to Exeter College to deliver a Future Skills Academy.

At Roundswell South work continues to construct a new Enterprise Centre, which is on target to complete early in the New Year. The service continues to support the development of Exeter Science Park and has supported the Science Park on the development of the Ada Lovelace Building and securing investment of £5m for a new Grow Out Building, under the LEP's Getting Building Fund.

In depth analysis and economic briefings have also been produced by the Service to monitor the impacts of COVID on the economy, its communities and workforce. This evidence base has supported the development of business cases into Government, and secured investment from the LEP. The Service has led on this for the region and presented information into Government, to our MPs and other stakeholders.

Dr Virginia Pearson
CHIEF OFFICER FOR COMMUNITIES, PUBLIC HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND PROSPERITY

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate Resources and Asset Management:
Councillor John Hart

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

Cabinet Member for Highway Management: Councillor Stuart Hughes

Cabinet Member for Infrastructure Development and Waste: Councillor Andrea Davis

Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills: Councillor Rufus Gilbert

Cabinet Member for Community, Public Health, Transportation and Environmental Services: Councillor Roger Croad

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
Nil		

Service Delivery for PTE Communities and EES In Year Briefing - Final