

Service Delivery for Communities, Public Health and Prosperity: In-Year Briefing Report of the Director of Public Health, Communities and Prosperity

Briefing paper by the Director of Public Health, Communities and Prosperity

1. Introduction

This mid-year report for Scrutiny covers the functions of Public Health, Communities, and Prosperity i.e. the service areas of Public Health (Director of Public Health, Communities & Prosperity: Steven Brown), Communities (Head of Service: Simon Kitchen), Prosperity (Head of Service: Keri Denton).

2. Public Health – Director of Public Health: Steven Brown

Public health and health protection

Public Health Devon has been at the forefront of the local and regional response to the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic.

Specifically, Public Health Devon has led the Covid-19 tactical response through a multi-agency Tactical Management Group (TMG), which was chaired by the Director of Public Health. This has enabled Devon County Council to:

- mobilise a rapid response across all key Council services;
- co-ordinate effort across the Local Authority;
- lead work with District Council partners, with the NHS, the police and other partners;
- Support the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme.

The Devon Tactical Management Group has continued to operate providing a clear governance structure to enable timely decisions to be taken about the deployment of additional resources, including financial resources, via the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), and key actions to help control the spread of the virus.

Public Health Devon has since established and has provided continued leadership for:

- The Devon Local Outbreak Management Plan
- The Devon and Torbay Covid-19 Health Protection Board
- Team Devon Local Outbreak Engagement Board
- Devon Tactical Management Group.

While key operational elements of the COVID-19 response, such as contact tracing and community testing have been stood down in Devon, following national policy decisions, Public Health Devon has continued to support the operational delivery of the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Public Health Intelligence and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

The Public Health Intelligence Team has continued to develop and innovate the utilisation of data and intelligence to support access and better utilisation of data. The development of Power BI and interactive dashboards to present COVID-19 data as well as other key public health information such as the Child Weight Management Programme and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment are seen as best practice. The Team is also in the process of producing a new Cost-of-Living Dashboard to support local response.

Public health and health improvement

Public Health's commissioned services continue to innovate and utilise the experience gained through the Pandemic to continue to meet the needs of Devon residents. Following a reduction in service demand throughout the pandemic demand for public health services are starting to increase specifically sexual health services, substance misuse and healthy lifestyle.

Additional national grant funding has been received to support delivery of the recently published national drugs strategy. A new Devon Drug and Alcohol Strategic Partnership has been established which has responsibility to produce a joint needs assessment and a local delivery plan to break drug supply chains, ensure an effective treatment and recovery system and reduce demand for recreational drugs.

The Public Health Nursing Service has continued to face workforce challenges both in recruitment and retention of staff. A service improvement plan has been developed to address this challenge.

Public Mental Health remains a priority post pandemic. Devon County Council has signed up to and supports UKHSA's Concordat for Better Mental Health. An audit was undertaken earlier in 2022 to identify gaps and areas for improvement in relation to the Concordat's framework. The system wide All Age Mental Health group has been re-established to scope and deliver a partnership plan. The plan is structured in line with the evidence base and Concordat's framework and dovetails with the work of Devon's Community Mental Health Framework Programme.

Public Health and Health Inequalities

Inclusion health groups are the most vulnerable groups of our society and include those who are homeless; vulnerable migrants; Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities; sex workers; and victims of modern slavery. While they make up small proportion of population as a whole, they experience disproportionately and significant poorer health and opportunity. The risk of homelessness and disadvantage are worsening but there are many opportunities (and synergies between the groups) for improvement. A health needs assessment is currently underway across each Devon Local Care Partnership area to understand the challenges more holistically and to inform a shift towards alliance working. Strategic vision and governance of this key agenda in reducing health inequalities is currently being scoped.

Delivery of the budget in line with the previously agreed budget

The work of Public Health Devon - and all of its commissioned services - are funded from within a ring-fenced grant that is paid directly to Devon County Council from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). There are no actual or projected overspends to report against budget projections at the mid-year point.

There are underspends emerging at the mid-year point for two reasons:

- As a result of the pandemic, fewer people overall have accessed services in both General Practice and in community pharmacies and while demand is increasing steadily it will take some time to reach pre-pandemic levels.
- Public Health Devon has utilised the central Government Covid-19 funding, Contain Outbreak Management Funding (COMF), to support staffing resource and some services during the pandemic, funding that otherwise would have had to come from Public Health's budget.

However, any underspends represent **delayed** costs, rather than savings. Contained Outbreak Management Funding ceases at the end of March 2023. Money that hasn't been spent at year end remains within the statutory Public Health ring-fenced reserve, as required by the conditions of the Grant, and it may only be spent on the Grant's defined public health services.

3. Communities – Head of Service – Simon Kitchen

The Communities portfolio leads a range of commissioning, intervention and collaboration on behalf of the Council to develop services and support, helping people and organisations in communities to be better connected, resilient and safe.

However, increasingly this year the team's work has focussed on support around the emerging priorities of resettlement, migration and in responding to those in poverty or at risk of food and fuel insecurity.

Food and Fuel Insecurity

In Devon, levels of food insecurity (a lack of the financial resources needed to ensure reliable access to food) have risen from 17% overall (Spring 2021) to around 29% in October 2022. However, in recent research commissioned by the Council, these levels are considerably higher in households on low income and combined with other factors:

- where household income is less than £16,190 and with children (70%);
- single adult households with children (60%);
- households where the main respondent is long-term sick or disabled (58%).

Around fuel insecurity overall, 79% of Devon households said they were planning to reduce their energy usage, with 36% saying they were planning to switch their heating off altogether; and 15% said they were planning to spend time somewhere else to keep warm.

To help to meet some of these challenges, the team have worked across multiple partners to distribute around £15 Million of funding, made available to the Council from the Department of Work and Pensions since October 2021, to support those most in need and to help to address the significantly rising cost of living.

A range of support gateways have been established including, Free School Meals Holiday Vouchers; funding a shared Team Devon District/City Council Hardship Scheme; a Citizen Advice Energy Relief Scheme; supporting a Minor Rapid Energy Efficiency Measures Pilot (via Cosy Devon); funding an Early Help Family Support Scheme, and funding Devon Community Foundation – to deliver a voluntary sector and community Grant Scheme. Details of these schemes and of the wider support available can be found on the Council's website [Help with the cost of living in Devon - Devon County Council](#).

The need for support from people and communities continues to rise; evidenced by eligibility for Free School meals, which has risen from around 10,000 children in 2018 in Devon; to 18,900 in January 2021, to now over 20,000 children locally.

To further help communities and people needing to build self/community resilience, improve mental health, wellbeing support and wider connection, the Council launched its Growing Communities Fund in April 2022. Grants of £500 - £3,000 are available. Already this year 126 awards have been made with a value of over £236,000. A further £200,000 is available.

Given the current cost of living crisis, funding has been further targeted towards reducing food/fuel inequalities, and by supporting Warm Spaces provision. Further details can be found on the Council's website [Growing Communities Fund - Communities \(devon.gov.uk\)](#).

Migration and Resettlement Programme

Throughout Devon's history the county has seen significant migration and resettlement and over the last year the team have worked as part of a national effort to assist individuals and families in their relocation to the UK/Devon via Government schemes and resettlement programmes which provide safe and legal routes (from Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine in particular).

Support is being provided to families in Devon in two Home Office commissioned bridging hotels to help them settle into life in the UK and find a place of sanctuary. There is a focus on wellbeing and resilience to help people take their next steps into a home of their own. Currently 66 adults and 44 children live in the bridging hotels with children attending local schools and families accessing local provision supported by volunteers. The team have led local work in delivering the Homes for Ukraine scheme as part of a Team Devon response: There are 1006 sponsors registered in Devon, with 1071 properties offered by hosts, and 1576 visa arrivals supported by ongoing DBS and safeguarding checks and support across a range of complex scenarios. We can anticipate around 2,600 people to ultimately arrive from Ukraine through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the highest number in the Region.

The majority of the Council's work across migration and resettlement is grant funded by the Home Office and is expected to continue into 2023. The Council's work would not be possible without the ongoing support of local people and partners.

Alongside direct support, the team are leading ongoing work to build trust and confidence with communities and improve the ways in which DCC consults, engages with and supports diverse ethnic communities in Devon. Over the last twelve months the Communities team have facilitated a significant increase and improvement in ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) provision to try to ensure all refugees have access to English language learning opportunities, according to their needs, supporting people into work and learning.

In recent weeks the team have supported partners and co-ordination around the emergency hotel accommodation in Ilfracombe; with around 150 people seeking asylum; building on learning earlier this year from a similar facility in Tiverton. Given the current system pressures we can anticipate a range of similar facilities being rapidly deployed across the UK and wider asylum displacement will impact Devon over the next year when housing authorities are being tasked with delivering accommodation for those seeking asylum.

Community Safety

Part of the wider Communities Team brings together several inter-related strands of Community Safety work where the focus is primarily on tackling and preventing violence and abuse. The team has strengthened the Council's capacity and capability in this space, in order to effectively discharge significant organisational responsibilities in relation to a range of statutory duties (which includes the Domestic Abuse Act, the Prevent Duty (countering extremism and terrorism; and the incoming Serious Violence Duty).

Work to develop and now deliver the Council's [Strategy](#) for domestic abuse support in safe accommodation (in accordance with the Council's new Statutory Duty under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021) continues, including using the lived experiences of victims and survivors of domestic abuse to inform the procurement of a new trauma responsive therapeutic intervention service.

The team's work continues to streamline and strengthen our Partnership arrangements and to develop innovation and learning in these complex areas. The team have adopted a 'test and learn' approach with pilot projects (such as the Women First project) to inform the development of organisation and system wide responses to tackling violence and its causes; and a 'behaviour change' offer to prevent future violence and abuse.

The team is leading work with partners across the peninsula to build the response to the forthcoming Serious Violence Duty. The Duty is due to come into effect in early 2023 with a year for statutory partners, including Devon County Council, to be compliant including a requirement for local areas to publish a strategy outlining work to prevent and reduce serious violence.

Last month the Council hosted a visit from the Security Minister, Tom Tugendhat MP, to discuss delivery of the Prevent Duty in Devon. The meeting was an opportunity to showcase innovative work in Devon, including activity that has received national recognition, to discuss the differences and challenges of delivering Prevent in a rural geography, and share insight to inform the government's future plans for Prevent and Channel.

Active Devon

Active Devon, falls within the remit of the Communities team, is an externally funded partnership for which DCC is the accountable body. It is one of a nationwide network of 43 Active Partnerships, funded primarily through Sport England. It promotes the use of community base physical activity and active lifestyles to make a positive contribution to various social outcomes. These include physical & mental wellbeing, community development and individual development. It works with a broad range of local community-based partners to pursue its mission of unlocking the ability of movement to change lives.

In 2022-23, Active Devon engaged over 7,000 children and young people in positive physical activity experiences in a variety of activities and settings, through key programmes such as School Games and Opening School Facilities. Over 150 volunteers and staff working with children and young people were engaged through training and development opportunities through the new DfE Primary PE and the Sport Premium CPD pilot project

The Connecting Actively to Nature programme was able to resume and formed a key part in supporting the Later Life audience in Covid recovery. Inclusive outdoor physical activity sessions for inactive over 55's were delivered through over 60 local projects. Active Devon helped to safeguard the future of volunteer led, short and inclusive walking groups as we shaped the Devon response to the transition to the Ramblers Wellbeing Walks programme. This included the development of several new walks and multiple new volunteers.

Ongoing digital challenge activities were adapted to focus on engaging participants who were least active. The month long 'Let's Walk and More' challenge, supported by DCC, saw nearly 1,000 participants register 43,000,000 steps, an equivalent carbon emissions reduction of 98,000 kg.

Devon Libraries

Devon's libraries continue to support reading and communication skills development from birth upwards, through activities such as Storytime and Bounce & Rhyme sessions. Around 10,000 children across Devon take part in the Summer Reading Challenge every year. 89,000 children are members of our libraries, borrowing around 650,000 books per year, promoting and encouraging a love of reading. Libraries provide free Bookstart Baby & Treasure Packs & deliver Bookstart Corner courses: parents & children play together and learn about the importance of books, rhyme, puppets and mask-making in early years.

Libraries Unlimited offer weekly sessions for parents and carers to weigh their babies, using calibrated Public Health scales, replacing the service previously provided by Children's Centres.

Total issues of physical and digital items of e-books and audiobooks have now exceeded pre pandemic levels of 2019 and our 50 libraries continue to be vibrant community spaces able to offer a range of support to all Devon's residents to meet and be creative. The winter support programme providing warm and safe spaces continues alongside access to specific information to help navigate through the cost-of-living challenges.

Youth Service

Every year our Youth Services provided by DYS-Space directly support over 2,800 young people to unlock their limitless potential and become the adults they wish to be. At least a quarter (700) of these young people have protected characteristics, making our Youth Services the front line in preventing, identifying, addressing, and resolving young people's challenges.

Our community-based youth clubs and services are intentionally accessible and designed with young people's help, allowing our youth workers to build positive and trusting long term relationships whatever the young person's situation.

DYS-Space are currently working with 119 young people who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion and have successfully prevented 105 of them from being permanently excluded from full-time education in the past year.

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

The Service has continued to deliver a range of services to support economic recovery, including skills and workforce development, infrastructure investments, regulatory services and business support and leading on a case for devolution in partnership with Team Devon. The Service operates in a pressured environment with rapidly changing economic policy and has adapted its work to respond to volatile and changing economic conditions, flexing external funding and income to respond to local challenges and skills gaps. The Service has secured additional external funding to increase impact and support, including the Community Renewal Fund, Future Farm Resilience Fund, Multiply and One Public Estate and in partnership has supported the Plymouth and South Devon Freeport be designated. The Service has also delivered the Council's £6m Economic Recovery Programme.

Trading Standards

The Heart of the South West Trading Standards Service has assisted over 185 businesses, undertaken over 500 business interventions and managed over 3,700 complaints. The joint Service is working with partners such as Defra/APHA on Avian Influenza and have received 18 confirmed outbreaks including the virus mutating and transferring to a human being. We continue to work with Citizens Advice, Social Services, Police and Housing on Scams and Doorstep Crime and HMRC/Public Health on the sale of illicit tobacco and the increased number of complaints regarding Vaping amongst secondary school-aged children. Recruitment and retention of Trading Standards Officers is placing Trading Services under pressure and the age profile of our workforce will see exiting of up to a quarter of our qualified workforce in the next three years.

Future Farm Resilience Programme

The Service is leading a region-wide Future Farm Resilience Programme across the Great South West, securing £2.6m from Defra over the next three years. Through Thrive, the Service has supported 576 businesses this year so far across the Heart of the South West and continues to deliver the Heart of the South West Growth Hub for the Local Enterprise Partnership. Operating across a sub-regional geography has meant the Service has benefited from economies of scale over previous years. Whilst there are income generation opportunities the capacity of the Service is constrained to develop further proposals.

Exeter Science Park

Support for Exeter Science Park has continued and has seen the opening of the George Parker Bidder Building, and the Council is leading on securing a 142-bedroom hotel. Construction is progressing well and is on schedule to open in March next year for the Node Phase 2 at Roundswell South. We have successfully secured additional EU funding to support this new extension, which has assisted to reduce cost increases and pressures. Developments at Skypark are continuing including a new facility for Stovax and a small business workshop scheme, although the pipeline for new occupiers is challenging given the current construction and inflationary pressures.

Devolution pilot

As part of the County's selection as one of the 9 Devolution pilots in February 2022, the Service has also led upon the preparation and development of both the wider case for devolution across the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay area, working with Team Devon as well as coordinating activity around Skills, Environment and Transport on behalf of the wider partnership. We currently await next steps from Government on the devolution approach.

Skills and Employment

Significant packages of support are being delivered through the Skills and Employment Team, addressing labour market constraints, supporting upskilling for key sectors and parts of our workforce, promoting opportunities for young people and delivering careers advice and guidance.

Careers South West

Careers South West and the Careers Hub are delivering support to individuals and schools, supporting enhanced careers advice for young people, and supporting over 155 schools with careers support to improve life chances. External funding has been won to support 12 schools and 500 disadvantaged year-9 girls to benefit from tailored personal development and career support led by professional female business leaders to improve confidence and aspirations. There is a growing social mobility pressure across the County and continuing to reach and engage young people in employment and training remains a challenge.

Working innovatively with Adult Social Care we are delivering Ability not Disability, supporting over 170 referrals county-wide, achieved 33 people into paid work with another 158 accessing pre-employment support.

Learn Devon

Learn Devon continues to deliver a Be Ready project providing advice and support for businesses to recruit adults with disabilities. These programmes have benefitted from external funding which ends in March 2023, despite demand to continue with these effective schemes. Multiplier funding has been secured by the Service and the opportunity to deliver essential maths skills to communities to support the challenges of cost of living and day to day maths skills. Learn Devon has also delivered English, Maths GCSE's to over 100 people achieving a success rate of over 96% for Grade 4 and above.

Recommendations

- 5.1 Health and Adult Care Scrutiny is asked to note the update on the delivery of Public Health, Communities and Prosperity services so far in 2022.
- 6. Financial considerations**
 - 6.1 Contained within the report.
- 7. Legal considerations**
 - 7.1 The deployment of the Public Health Grant for specified services is statutory responsibility under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.
- 8. Environmental impact considerations**
 - 8.1 Contained within the report.
- 9. Equality considerations**
 - 9.1 Contained within the report.
- 10. Risk assessment considerations**
 - 10.1 Contained within the report.

Steven Brown
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, COMMUNITIES AND PROSPERITY

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality: Councillor Roger Croad
Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery and Skills: Councillor Rufus Gilbert

Director / Head of Service: Steven Brown, Director of Public Health, Communities and Prosperity

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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BACKGROUND PAPER NIL