

Cllr Saywell's report – March 2021

Coronavirus

- Stats – As of 15th March the DCC area of Devon now up to 19,660 coronavirus infections since the start of the pandemic.
- Since the 10th March that is a weekly increase of 179 infections, with most new infections coming from a spike in East Devon.
- By way of comparison... in Torridge there were 2 new infections in the last 7 days, North Devon 8 in the last 7 days, West Devon 3 cases in the last 7 days.
- There are over 20,000 tests a week being carried out in the County.
- In all 18 Parishes within Torrington Rural there were 0-2 new infections in the seven days up to 10th March. When there are fewer than 3 infections the Government does not show the data to protect individuals' identities.

Infection cases continue to fall in Devon, though the rate of decline how now slowed, but overall our infection rate per 100,000 remains very low (22.3), compared with the national England average of 61. **In Torridge our infection rate is just 2.9, the lowest in England and third lowest in the UK behind just the Orkney and Shetland Islands!**

Locally, we are continuing to do well in keeping our infection rates down. With the rollout of the vaccine and the roadmap out of lockdown we will hopefully see a return to normality later this year, but until then it does remain vital that we keep up our efforts to follow the guidance of staying at home and if and when we are out and about to follow the 'hands, face, space' guidance.

While numbers are so low it doesn't take much, a few cases in a couple of workplaces, for the figures to go in the wrong direction and to see a high percentage increase, so keeping to the rules is still very important. We are still seeing some small, localised outbreaks in some workplaces in Devon and it is too early to say yet impact the 'unlocking' will have with the return of schools, premises re-opening etc.

Community Testing

Community Testing for coronavirus is being rolled out across Devon, with testing facilities now in Barnstaple, Okehampton (Tuesday & Friday only), Tiverton, and Exeter.

Plans are afoot to have a mobile testing facility to cover Torrington, Holsworthy, Hartland and Bradworthy in March, though exact dates to be determined. The aim is to have testing as accessible as it can be.

Community testing will help to find individuals who have COVID-19 but do not have symptoms and need to isolate and who may inadvertently be spreading the virus. A positive or negative result will not remove the need to follow existing COVID measures socially and in the workplace.

Rapid lateral flow tests will be used, which will provide a result within thirty minutes. This will not be a substitute for the national coronavirus testing – **if you are symptomatic, people should book a free NHS test via the GOV.UK website or by calling 119. Do not use community testing.**

When this is up and running locally, or if people would like to use the Barnstaple site, please use devon.cc/testing to book a test.

Please remember, if you have symptoms book a test through the Government website. Don't use

DCC Community Testing.

COVID Vaccinations

The rollout of the vaccine in Devon and in Torrington Rural continues to go well.

I sent a briefing note from the NHS to the Parish Council this week but the main points for vaccine rollout:

- **486,522 people in Devon received their first vaccine dose** between 8th December – 7th March
- **Latest estimate is 95% of over 70s in Devon have received their first dose.** About a quarter of those aged 16-60 have also received a first dose, this group includes frontline healthcare workers and those who are clinically vulnerable.
- The NHS in Devon are focusing on people aged 56-59 and over, and those who are clinically vulnerable.
- **Even when you have been vaccinated, you must still continue to follow the COVID-19 safety rules – stay at home as much as possible and remember hands, face, space.**

This remains a huge logistical exercise, very much dependent upon the speed and rate of vaccine supplies. Please wait for the NHS to contact you when it is your turn. The roll out is getting more localised, those who cannot travel far should be able to get their jab administered locally.

Return to School

It is still early days but so far the return to school has gone very well, with a 95% attendance rate reported for Schools in Devon. The testing regime for Schools also appears to have been working well so far...

Support for Families over Easter – Holiday Activities and Food Programme

Devon County Council has been awarded £1.69 million from the Department for Education to provide Holiday Activities and Food for children aged 5-16 on benefit related Free School Meals.

DCC are starting this process for the Easter Holidays and would welcome applications from Torrington Rural if they can demonstrate it is for the eligible children on Free School Meals.

The timescale for the HAF is 4 hours per day for 4 days over the Easter Holidays, which includes a nutritious hot meal, if you would like to contact the relevant officer, Melissa Filby 01392 383000 or email at melissa.filby@devon.gov.uk, she would be happy to discuss your project and if it fits the HAF criteria.

The scheme will be run across all of Devon for the summer holidays.

DCC Budget

The main work over January and February at the County Council has been the budget setting process. The Budget was approved at Full Council on the 18th February with more cash for vulnerable adults and children, health and potholes.

Key points:

- 1 £37m extra cash injection into vital services, including an additional £21.7m for Adult Care and Health, and £11.4m for Children's Services.
- 2 For Highways there will be an injection of extra revenue into the service including £600,000 for pot-holes and a new £100,000 fund for Town and Parishes to enhance street features.
- 3 An additional £600,000 into the Hardship Fund, to be distributed to the District Councils, to help people badly affected by the pandemic who may have been made redundant but are not yet receiving universal credit or benefit support.
- 4 The total overall revenue budget will be in excess of £578m.
- 5 To help pay for these increases, Council Tax will unfortunately have to rise – up 1.99% for general services and 3% dedicated solely to Adult Social Care. This will equate to an extra £1.38 a week for an average Band D household.
- 6 I know Council Tax rises are never welcome... but this will mean we both maintain vital services and can endeavour to improve them.
- 7 The backdrop to the budget is one of huge uncertainty and risk – we do not know how long the pandemic will continue for or what the longer term impact on the economy, public health and demand for services will be.

Highways

I believe the meeting with the Neighbourhood Officer and Members of the Parish Council went well.

Potholes and drainage issues have continued into this month, though anecdotally Highways have started to catch up on the pothole backlog. If there are any urgent issues in the Parish then please let me know and I will follow them up.

Elections

The Government have confirmed that the May Elections to Devon County Council **will** be taking place on May 6th. I will be re-standing and am hopeful of re-election! I have worked hard for Petrockstowe in the last four years and working together I believe we have achieved a lot, including resurfacing the road through the village, the new HGV signs for the quarry, and improvements to the Tarka Trail junction/exit to name but a few improvements that have taken place in the last four years... Though as ever there is still more to do. I will remain at your service until May, and I hope to be afterwards as well.

If anyone is unsure or uncertain about voting in the election they can apply for a Postal Vote or a Proxy Vote. Emergency Proxies will also be available for anyone who is told to self-isolate.

As ever, if there are any issues you'd like me to look into please get in touch.

Cllr Hurley's Report - March 2021

Budget + C/T

You may be aware that Full Council passed the Budget recommendations at the meeting held on 22nd February. A simplistic view of sources of income for Torridge based on highest to lowest are Fees and Charges, Council Tax, Business Rates and Government Grants. Government funding is reducing year on year with an assumption that Councils will raise more of the required revenue at a local level to provide services. Charges for the green waste collection service will increase from £35 pa to £50 pa over a three year period. This is similar to other LA's in Devon who have, or are, increasing charges. This means that the C/T bills that we will all be receiving shortly will show a

Band D increase of £5. The increase in the average Band D C/T for Town and Parish Councils is 2.5%. DCC C/T increase will be 4.99%. OPCC rises by £14.93 (6.73%) for Band D and the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue will increase by 1.99% for a Band D. This means that the Band D C/T bill will rise by an average of 4.9%. Please remember that Torridge receives only 8.4 pence per pound collected.

G7 Conference at Carbis Bay

As I'm sure you are all aware the G7 Conference is due to be held at Carbis Bay in June. Like many others I was concerned as to how the Policing was going to be funded and was more than a little worried that the taxpayers of Devon and Cornwall would be footing the bill. In my role as a Councillor Advocate for the OPCC I was recently sent a video in which Assistant Chief Constable Glen Mayhew, who is leading the Policing of the G7 event, explained that other Forces are going to be providing extra manpower to cover the event and the funding for the Police to cover the event is being provided from Government sources.

Community Emergency Plan

I recently attended a Zoom meeting and presentation given by Devon Communities Together where CEP's were outlined and explained. A CEP is devised by a community themselves which is very often led by the Town or Parish Council and local volunteers. It follows a template and identifies possible risks, how they might be mitigated, what resources are needed and how the community would contribute to responding to an event. There are times when a prepared group of volunteers, first on the scene, can reduce the impact of an event until professional help arrives. The plans are held on a database that is used by responding services to understand who the local contacts are and what resources are available locally. I must stress that the onus of developing a CEP does not fall entirely on the PC as other local volunteers are able to help formulate the plan. Financial support is available.

Devon Communities Together are more than happy to provide support.
<https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/resilience-forum-resources>

Planning Manager and PC's

I asked the Planning Manager to comment with regard to PC's feeling that any response to Torridge with regard to planning applications seemed to be a waste of time. He will be speaking to Planners shortly and will issue a response in the near future. He did add in his reply to me that "Parish Councils are an important part of the planning process but I do appreciate that they feel somewhat ignored given the position with the 5 year housing land supply.

Waste and Recycling

I asked a waste a recycling officer for figures of tonnage collected over the Christmas period. In January in addition to just over 1000 tons of recycling that was collected (including food) over 1050 tons of refuse was also collected. December's recycling collection was around 150 tons less than January's at 893 tons.

OPCC and Speedwatch

I recently attended an Office of the Police and Crime Commissionaire's meeting for Councillor Advocates that discussed Speedwatch teams. The OPCC wanted to know of any set up problems,

how motorists react to them, how effective it is believed that they are, recruiting volunteers to the teams and any other relevant issues. I don't know if Petrockstowe has a Speedwatch Team or indeed wants one but I'm happy to discuss with somebody if either is the case.

Tree Preservation Orders Map

A tree preservation order map has now been compiled and is available to view on the TDC website.

<https://publicaccess.torridge.gov.uk/online-applications/spatialDisplay.do?action=display&searchType=Trees>

To view, check that the “change what you see on the map” selection is for all years.

Cllr Wiseman’s Report - March 2021

Torridge has set its council tax rate. It is going up by £5 for a band D property which is equal to 2.96%. The majority of properties in torridge are in band A B and C, and the increase in these brands will be lower than in band D. This increase is in light of the reducing funding from central government, both from our main grant and new homes bonus which has been a major income stream over the past few years.

The new visitors centre at Northampton Borrows is progressing well and the coffee shop should be open this summer, the access road is also being improved where it goes around Sandymere.

Westward Ho! Sea defences have been complicated with the addition of 2000 tonnes of large rocks at the Village end of the beach. This work will be paid for by the environment agency.

Elections are going ahead on the 6th March for County councillors and the Police and Crime Commissioner. If you wish to stand as a candidate the closing date is 8th April. Any one not currently registered to vote has to do so by 19th April, postal votes can be applied for up until 20th April and proxy votes by 27th April. If you are ordered to self isolate and emergency postal vote can be applied for up until 6 days before the election. All this can be found via the Torridge web site.

Campaigning for the election is allowed but must follow COVID safe rules.