

## Yarty Ward Report – Winter 2020; Cllr. Paul Hayward

Dear Yarty Ward residents.

Who would have thought, back in April this year, that we would still be facing such challenges from the Covid pandemic in December? It seems almost inconceivable that our local community is still suffering such hardship, anxiety and uncertainty, and whilst we are now at a point where a vaccine is available (and starting to be distributed), the effects of the restrictions and the consequential economic / health and wellbeing impact will be with us for a great deal longer, I fear.

Back in April 2020, I reported that a great many EDDC staff had been seconded to Covid19 resilience duties. Naturally, over the summer, the vast majority of those staff returned to their posts but, as at the time of writing this report, they are once again at the frontline of keeping Council's services operational, whilst undertaking a great many additional duties and responsibilities, with the consequence that their day-to-day work has been put on hold for the time being. This will have a short-term effect on some services

That said, the District Council has not been slow in implementing (and administering) a wide range of financial support packages to assist those living, and working, in East Devon.

Currently, the following funds are open:

The Local Restriction Support Grant; If your business was forced to close (or suffered significant falls in income) between the 5<sup>th</sup> November and 2<sup>nd</sup> December, you may be eligible to make a claim from this government-funded scheme. The officers at EDDC have already been in touch with all those businesses that they believe (from their data) were able to make a claim – but, feel free to visit the EDDC website to check the eligibility criteria (LRSG)

<https://eastdevon.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/businesses-employers-and-employees/business-grants/>

Next, there is the Additional Restriction Grant (ARG). This is a discretionary fund available to those not eligible for the LRSG. This is newly created and will go live at the start of December. Details will be available from the same website as above. The money for this fund was made available by central government and has been split into 3 categories; 1) A fund of £1m to support immediate business hardship for the recent 28 day "lockdown". 2) A fund of £1m to be used to support business innovation and strategic economic projects aimed at protecting our high streets and the wider economic output to safeguard jobs and "at-risk" sectors. Finally, 3) A retained fund of just over £900,000 which we have been guided to keep back in case of further Tier restrictions in 2021; *Council has been unequivocally told that NO further funding will be forthcoming from Whitehall.*

There is scope to "vire" or move funds between the three schemes if demand or necessity dictates. This will be reviewed on a regular basis. Needless to say, like the last fund available, we recognise that there is not enough to satisfy every claim and to help every business but we will allocate in a fair and equitable and proportionate manner to support as many businesses as we can. The rules have also been relaxed to assist home-workers and other affected businesses. I must stress that this fund is not designed to cover lost income; but more to address costs incurred whilst being unable to trade.

The existing national government schemes for employees furloughed, and for self-employed persons suffering income losses, still remain open and I would encourage those affected to claim wherever they are able to.

In terms of personal financial support, Council operates a Coronavirus Helpdesk (or support hub) and this can be reached via 01395 571500 or by accessing our website as below:

<https://eastdevon.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/community-support/coronavirus-community-support-hub/>

There are also still funds available for individuals suffering hardship, and for community groups assisting those in need in their local areas.

These include:

*EDDC Crowdfunding*

*Coronavirus Community Food Fund*

*Covid-19 Fund (Formerly the Prompt Action Fund)*

*EDDC Hardship Fund*

*DCC Locality Funding*

*Devon CoronaVirus Response / Recovery Fund, and more available online.*

If I can assist in helping to match funds with those seeking help, please don't hesitate to let me know.

There are also a wide variety of community groups providing support; local to Axminster, we have ACER (Axminster Community Emergency Response), Project Food, Nourish, Axminster Churches Together and almost every village or smaller community has people eager and willing to help. Your local parish magazines / newsletters / websites and noticeboards will no doubt contain details of such schemes and support groups.

The District Council is working flat-out to both support business, and residents, as we move into the Winter period as a Tier 2 area, but is also actively looking to support the wider economy with a strategic package of support and financial help. With the recent job losses across the area (from Exeter Airport to Oscar Mayer), we are very mindful that the (already significant) damage to the economy may not yet be at its most serious and we are reacting to new events, news and challenges as quickly and as best as we can.

Turning to other news, I'll be as brief as I can as I imagine that information above is all that residents wish to read about at this time, given the seriousness of the situation.

Headlines:

EDDC is working with parish and town councils (via the Asset Management Forum) to discuss how they might wish to consider taking on district assets for their benefit of their communities; from benches and dog bins, to car parks and buildings, there is a policy in the pipeline that will allow a clear and structured process to be followed so that all towns and villages have the same opportunities to devolve down the services that matter most to residents. The meetings of the AMF are held in public \* and livestreamed via YouTube if you wish to watch and see for yourself how the policy is being created.

\* *As are all meetings at EDDC*

The process of Section 106 / CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) fund allocation continues to move slower than I would like as EDDC staff are moved elsewhere to assist in the CV19 response. This is money that needs to be spent in our local area and I will keep pressing for full transparency, reporting and accountability in this regard.

In May 2021, there will hopefully be local County Council elections and this, coupled with the resumption of physical Council meetings, may well see the dawn of hybrid Council meetings where Councillors (and the public) can attend either in person in the room, or via a PC or tablet screen. This will require a wholesale change in how smaller Councils conduct their meetings, with new IT and broadband challenges. I know that the current way of running meetings (virtually, via Zoom) has increased public engagement and made Councils more open and I would welcome comment from residents as to whether you are more likely to “participate” in your local democratic process with the benefit of the technology available to you.

On the subject of broadband, there is still a wide gulf between those able to obtain higher “fibre” broadband speeds in our rural parishes and those who cannot! The Devon County CDS project (“Connecting Devon and Somerset”) has struggled to connect as many homes as they first intended and – with the need to work “from home” due to Covid – the limitations of a slow or unstable connection have been laid bare. Communities can join forces to “lobby” BT and others to upgrade and enhance local broadband services and I would urge everyone to talk to your neighbours, your community, friends and relations to see how speeds compare and make your displeasure known if you are not getting the service and speed you deserve. EDDC has made this one of our primary goals for rural economic improvements but we need you all to be loud and to be persistent in your demands for “Better Broadband for All”

EDDC has, as you probably will already be aware, disconnected itself from the GESP \* planning process earlier this year and has now committed to an urgent review of the existing Local Plan in order to give a voice to local communities as to how they wish development to evolve in their neighbourhoods and across East Devon. Central Government targets have been thrown back as completely unsustainable and unrealistic but we are all aware that a White Paper on Housing is doing the rounds in Westminster. EDDC submitted a strong rebuttal of the paper and is awaiting formal response from Westminster and the Secretary of State. Our local communities (via the parish and town Councils) will have to be vigilant and vocal in order to prevent the widescale and often inappropriate development of our beautiful green spaces.

( \* *Greater Exeter Strategic Plan* )

Finally, something that we all need to be aware of as we move into 2021; the UK’s exit from the EU. Whatever your views, opinions or vote on this subject, I am confident that we will be facing the challenges together as a unified district. If 2020 has taught us anything, it is that our local communities look after one another and that respect, kindness and tolerance mean much more to us than disharmony, squabbling and tribalism. Whatever 2021 throws at us, I am sure we can meet it head-on as friends, and as neighbours, and continue to do the right thing and help one another wherever, and whenever, we can.

Wishing you all a very merry Christmas and a peaceful, stress-free and tranquil New Year. My kindest regards and best wishes to you all.

*Paul*

Cllr. Paul Hayward, Yarty Ward Councillor (07711 929227)  
[phayward@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:phayward@eastdevon.gov.uk)