

Whimble & Blackdown **February 2021 - DCC Cllr Iain Chubb**

It is very much a case of two steps forward, one step back this month but the vaccine rollout being delivered at a rapidly escalating pace in Devon and beyond gives a great deal of hope for a measured lifting of current restrictions and a much better summer than 2020, improving all of our mental health and wellbeing, as well as the local Economy including jobs and inbound income from a likely ‘staycation boom’”

Covid-19

As we all see from media outlets Infection rates in the UK appear to have peaked and are now beginning to recede due to the impact of lockdown and the vaccination programme to a lesser degree. Thankfully we have not seen COVID variants in our area and with the new door to door testing regime in areas identified let’s hope it remains that way.

I was able to visit County Hall last week where a pop up testing site has been set up and at full tilt is able to test up to 2000 people each day, adding to other sites around the City. It is quite likely that in due course a vaccination site will also be sited at County Hall to add significant capacity to the programme, as well as more jabs being delivered at local G.P. surgeries and some private pharmacies in Supermarket locations that have space to maintain social distancing.

A significant number of beds occupied by COVID patients at the R, D & E NHS Trust sites are because of ‘out of area’ patients, but large numbers of frontline staff have been vaccinated and staff numbers returning to work is improving to ease the pressure a little.

Crime figures

I recently met via Zoom with Alison Hernandez, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall to discuss a wide range of issues and concerns, with Neil Parish our M.P. sitting in as his post bag is much the same as mine, albeit with a much higher volume of correspondence!

One of the matters raised was a lack of report of crime statistics to Parish and Town Councils by way of a regular report. The Devon and Cornwall Police web site at <https://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/your-right-to-information/our-people/our-performance/crime-figures/> is now providing regular ‘high level’ data but does not enable you to drill down to Parish level.

We agreed that resources are problematic and that an annual Parishes meeting (online and physical to maximise attendance) might have more relevance than bare statistics which are often skewed by one or two rarely occurring crimes and don’t really provide reasons or analysis behind the figures. I know this idea has been mooted before and has been trialled successfully in the DCC Axminster Division, but I will actively try to make this happen. I attach the data for Devon and Cornwall for September.

Fairer funding for Schools

DCC is part of the F40. ‘Fairer funding for schools’ campaign where we lag significantly behind other counties and is clearly unfair. I attach the latest update on the issues facing our schools and

education from all f40 members. This briefing has gone to MP's in the f40 areas,

Bridges and structures

For a change something a little more day to day about the work of DCC, It's the time of the year when the RAC Foundation release their annual bridge with 3,105 bridges (defined as structures over 1.5m in span) defined as being substandard. This was 1.6% up on the 3,055 figure twelve months before

Devon County Council is responsible for more bridges than any other authority in the UK and is recognised as one of the UK's leading authorities in structures asset management.

The term 'substandard' does not mean there is a problem with the bridge, it means we are managing 233 bridges that cannot carry the full 40 tonnes 'standard' highway load and only 3 of these need upgrading. In 2019 this figure was 244. Ninety of these are 'clapper' bridges on Dartmoor National Park, which are performing well, and the remainder are either scheduled for strengthening work or have a weight limit.

Those with weight limits are suitable for the road they are on, such as small lanes where large vehicles are unlikely to require access. DCC manage their bridge stock effectively in accordance with national guidelines to maintain the safety of the public.

Devon's chief Engineer made comment to the RAC Foundation following this year's survey saying "Whilst the number of substandard bridges may appear worrying there is often a good reason why a bridge falls into this category; it does not mean the bridge is unsafe as it will be managed by the Local Authority usually by a weight limit.

A restriction such as this may be wholly appropriate for the class of road and/or location, however the survey shows Local Authorities would want to remove 2256 bridges out of this sub-standard category which can only be achieved by more investment through Government funding".