

County Councillor 'Update' – Holsworthy Rural Ward (end-June 2019)

Firstly, and from a personal perspective my many thanks to everyone for their well-wishes during my partner's sudden and recent illness. We are both deeply thankful for how things have turned out and for the very kind wishes sent. You will have seen my earlier e-mail last week in relation to the **Devon Air Ambulance** (DAA) for which so many of us are especially grateful. The DAA does a wonderful service for our communities.

One of the big issues of the day, of course, is that of **Climate Change**. The County Council has not been alone in giving plenty of focus to this phenomenon, and, rightly so. Devon County Council has declared a climate emergency. We have committed to facilitating the reduction of Devon's carbon emissions to net-zero by 2050 at the latest and have formed the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group to enable strategic partners to collaborate on producing a Devon-wide Carbon Plan.

One such measure taken is in relation to street lighting. All of Devon County Council's streetlights will be converted to low carbon LEDs in the next three years. Converting all the streetlights in Devon to low carbon LEDs is the equivalent of taking 8,000 cars off the road.

Our Chief Executive, Phil Norrey, told members, officers and guests, "This is not about gestures, this is about action." The Council is working with partners including the University of Exeter on a Devon-wide plan to cut carbon emissions to net-zero. Dr Norrey is Chair of the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group (DCERG), made up of executives and chief officers of around 20 organisations including councils, emergency services and business groups.

Devon County Council's cabinet has agreed to retain a **youth service**, launching an invitation to tender for the running of the next five years of the service, with the successful bidder taking over on April 1, 2020.

The number of Devon pupils being educated at home (**Elective Home Education** (EHL)) has more than doubled in the last five years. Children's Scrutiny Committee met on 10 June 2019; an extract from the minutes including:

- "... the number of registered EHE pupils increasing at Years 9-11 due to a combination of factors including attending part-time college courses or suffering from stress/anxiety brought on by the pressure of exams and high expectations;
- there was no statutory requirement for a local authority to carry out any EHE visits, however, Devon did conduct monitoring visits and provide support if required;
- the responsibility for free school meals lay with the schools;
- it was difficult to assess the longer-term effects of EHE, as the DfE did not collate statistics; and

- at present, there was no right for a local authority to see the child to ensure elected education was taking place, unless there was a safeguarding issue, although Government was currently consulting on a potential change in the law in this area;" a matter for which the Cabinet Member for Children's Services is currently taking up with The Minister.

Whilst, on the matter of youngsters ... I have just been reading an article on **cyber crime** which evidences the NSPCC (National Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Children) calling on the government to prioritise young people's online safety after figures revealed police forces in the UK record an average of 22 cyber-related sex crimes against children every day.

The number of sexual offences against under-18s logged by police as having an online element doubled in four years to more than 8,000 in 2018-19, according to figures gathered by the children's charity from 40 forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The most common age of the victim was 13, but 185 offences involved children aged 10 and under, including babies, a series of freedom of information requests revealed. These awful crimes include online grooming, sexual communication with a child, and rape.

The excessive cuts to Police funding in recent years have resulted in our own Chief Constable, Shaun Sawyer, who does a wonderful job condemning current funding arrangements. With the increase in cyber crime growth Shaun clearly, and, rightly has a focus on this area of work.

Finally, and briefly, for anyone wishing to obtain even more information regarding 'a favourite topic' - a dedicated County Council website has now been launched to signpost all the latest Government advice and guidance around **Brexit**. The County Council will continue to develop and add to this as necessary and as more information becomes available. See <https://www.devon.gov.uk/brexit/>

With every best wish,

Barry