

Axminster Division Devon County Council Report 16th June 2020

This June Division report is inevitably taken up with the impact of COVID-19, but I feel that we can be much more confident about the many positives within this report and in the longer term our capacity to recover and thrive in the 'new normal', keeping in mind this vile disease will have flare ups again, we will be much better prepared, and ready from what has been learned in double quick time during this initial outbreak.

As of Friday last week a total of 192 patients previously infected with the disease have been discharged and 2 remain at Wonford. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 sadly 46 patients have sadly died (our sincere condolences to the families) at the R,D & E. So broadly it is good news as the rate of infection slows down in Devon and little negative to report, but to misquote regarding the virus and sadly 'it will be back'.

The next peak is not expected to occur until later in the year or early next, but it is important that we all remain vigilant and do not become complacent. The R,D & E has started Antibody Testing and early indications support previous estimates of a very low level of antibody (and hence likely immunity) in Devon compared even with e.g. Swindon and Gloucestershire. This immunity (or lack of it) significantly impacts the Effective R rate and hence the rate of spread of the disease.

A few broad questions relating to the R, D & E that have been cropping up, with the answers below that you might find of interest.

Are we restarting elective work?

We are executing a detailed elective recovery plan covering both the 'normal' trust and the Nuffield. It is being clinically led, at Executive, but urging some caution the number of 40+ and 52+ week wait patients has increased dramatically and productivity (e.g. due to increased infection control measures) has reduced. So, the plan will not recover the position, but will mitigate further deterioration and resources will be applied fairly and decisions driven by clinical need.

What is being done regarding staffing levels e.g. with changes in immigration rules?

The latest indications are that recruitment to further/higher education for NHS related professions has been strong. In part this is by further enhancement of an already strong NHS brand and by the relative job security that is on offer, particularly in the context of rapidly increasing unemployment.

How is the R,D & E supporting staff?

Like other NHS Trusts staff have been offered mentoring/counselling, free parking, hot drinks etc. Some of these will be maintained and enhanced (e.g. health and well-being support) others (e.g. free parking) will come to an end at some point.

Reducing inequalities

There has been much national comment on this recently, particularly in the light of increased mortality amongst BAME people and other global events. This is clearly to be welcomed. The R,D & E takes the equality and indeed inclusivity agendas very seriously (at Board level this is led by the CEO). We clearly can, must and will do better. I am very keen that we continue to focus on inclusivity beyond protected characteristics as well: I do not believe that our allocation of resource is as fair as we would like it to be.

The R value

Much is talked about "The R value". This is an important regional barometer based on modelling data, but while it provides an estimate of ongoing transmission, it alone does not determine the rate of growth of coronavirus and does not accurately reflect Devon's local data on the ground and should be treated with a little caution.

The South West R value spans from Isles of Scilly to Bristol, and while there have been hotspots in other parts of the region that increase the R value, Devon's figures have remained low.

We have the fifth lowest number of recorded cases when comparing Devon to all 150 upper tier local authorities and the consistency of the numbers suggest that levels have plateaued recently. That's in part due to our residents adhering to lockdown and heeding national guidance around staying home and social distancing. We have done well in that regard and need to keep that up.

Public Health, Transportation, Communities and Environment

COVID-19 Prompt Action Fund.

The fund was launched at the very start of the lockdown 24th March as a grant of less than £500 for constituted and not-for-private-profit voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector groups and organisations, town and parish councils, charities, or a combination of such groups working together.

After the first 50 or so applications it became obvious that, in some cases, £500 was not nearly enough to cover costs such as providing ready meals, transportation and a myriad of other services provided so a further grant fund was added to a maximum of £5,000.

To date some 370 separate applications have been received of which some 340 have been processed (some were clearly nothing to do with the present pandemic and the grants were seen to prop up ordinary activities!). Decisions to fund (or not) were triaged and it was difficult to take a decision, where DCC Officers have been very fair in processing them.

£330,000 has been distributed so far against an original budget of £480,000. Applications have been tailing off during the last couple of weeks; so much of the remaining fund will now be put towards the 'recovery phase', however that looks.

Transportation

Friday 5th June was the last day that National Bus Pass Holders were able to use passes before 09.30. Transport providers now need capacity for workers and commuters especially with social distancing reducing capacity on buses by more than 50%.

At present services are operating at a reduced level of around 50% (although this does vary across the County and are being additionally supported by two parallel CBSSG (COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant) funds, one paid direct to operators and one via local authorities for supported services, both about to expire. A new tranche of CBSSG will be paid direct to operators. Stagecoach has indicated that they will aim for an 80% restoration of bus services.

In view of the uncertainty over how to preserve existing supported services, with reference to the previously announced New Funding prior to the present crisis, it is highly likely that DCC will not proceed with our programme of new and extended services, but instead use the funding to supporting existing services during this period of uncertainty.

Libraries

Some Library buildings may continue to be closed due to the difficulty of social distancing, but library staff have been hard at work enhancing their e-readership by increasing their library of e-books, loaning e-readers and even hand delivering books to the more vulnerable or 'shielded' residents.

Children's Service and Schools

Since the COVID 19 emergency was announced over 300 schools (85%) have remained open for children of key workers and vulnerable children.

At the start on the 24th of March we had 2455 children in school and as the pandemic developed numbers went down to 866. Numbers gradually went up again and just before half term on the 20th of May nearly 4000 children were attending. The attendance of key workers and vulnerable children has been above the National average. Teachers have been brilliant from the start and it is hard to over emphasise how flexible and imaginative they have been.

The overwhelming majority of children have been at home and schools have been engaging with their students virtually and with workbooks. Devon's school population is about 96000.

Early Years and Childminders have been open as well, about 497 (44%). When the Government announced that some Primary Year Groups would return to school from the 1st of June 2020, all schools were asked to do a COVID 19 safety assessment, which is valuable for when they do re-open. Schools are keeping in close contact with parents and it is fully appreciated that many parents and teachers are concerned at schools starting to open. It's an individual decision. This virus is going to be with us for some time and we need to find a way to live with it.

Social Care

Primarily DCC needs to plan for the worst scenarios but hope for the best e.g. Domiciliary Care Agencies unable to provide Care, to clear and make space in our Acute Hospitals, as well as the need to provide additional accommodation and plan for a much worse scenario than has actually happened!

The extra planning, work and expense needs to be viewed in this context.

Adult Social Care staff have risen to the, enormous, challenge and have acted in an exemplary manner, matters not helped when one of the Senior Staff members succumbed to the virus and still recovering. However, DCC has been working for many years in partnership with the NHS and these good working relationships have undoubtedly helped to weather the storm.

Supporting Communities

Working to identify and contact people within different levels of vulnerability, such as those in the Shielding Group, and those that may be a drain on the Health and Care System without some support – so a voluntary and community response was needed to be identified and developed.

Working with the Clinical commission Group DCC to create a 'Third Capacity' building were identified buildings that could support the Covid-19 discharge pathway and release hospital bed capacity. In the end, 3 facilities were established – The Hamptons Hotel Exeter, Durrant House Hotel Bideford, and the Nightingale Hospital Sowton Exeter.

Supporting our Social Care Providers

DCC set We set up a Provider email mailbox that is monitored 7 days a week and made arrangements to ensure that Care Homes had enough food and developed a Provider Sustainability Framework that includes the payment of guaranteed hours for staff

A new contract has been offered to DCC Domiciliary care Providers (DCP), as long as they guaranteed to pay their Care workers £10/hour.

We helped coordinate the provision of PPE – sourced new suppliers – and became the provider of last resort – making available PPE to anyone who was in danger of running out.

DCC has also covered the additional costs of PPE

Where a Home has had a case of Covid-19, additional support and staffing were provided.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions ian.hall@devon.gov.uk

Tel:07917416021

ENDS