

## **Meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020**

### **Agenda Item No 8**

#### **Questions by Members to Full Council under Procedure rule 9.2**

##### **Question 1: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets from Councillor Ben Ingham**

About 80% of businesses nationally have reported a fall in business volumes and 40% have reduced employment. Job vacancies have fallen to half their previous level. If the accommodation and food sectors are permanently scarred, what help can the Council organise for young people?

##### **Answer:**

The latest data indicates that the claimant count for 16-24 year olds in the District increased from 190 in September 2019 to 715 in August 2020 before declining to 660 in September 2020.

The national Kickstart programme is specifically aimed at supporting young people (16-24 years olds) in to employment. As well as reviewing the potential to offer placements within the Council we will ensure that any East Devon businesses that are able to offer placements are provided with the right gateway support in: helping employers shaping Kickstart compliant placements; bidding to the DWP on their behalf; ensuring work coaches share details of the best candidates; ensuring prompt payment of the placement's wages; making sure the best wrap around support is provided to that young placement to maximise their changes of employment at the end of the 6 months.

More widely we will continue to work with partners such as the DWP, City and County Councils and local skills and training providers to support young people in the District. This includes through sector specific programmes (such as Building Greater Exeter), negotiating Employment and Skills plans with regard to major employment developments and supporting proposals such as the forthcoming Future Skills Centre at the former Flybe Training Academy.

Specifically in relation to the local food and drink sector we are extending the offer of support to Town Councils that want to lead and deliver Gate to Plate type events in 2021 (subject to Covid-19 safety requirements). There is also evidence that visitor demand for accommodation along with associated local retail spend has picked up strongly across East Devon in recent months. A significant proportion of accommodation providers received grant funding through the various programmes that have been deployed since the lockdown period and in the longer term we expect to see growing resilience in the sector.

##### **Question 2: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets from Councillor Ben Ingham**

In East Devon higher numbers of over 50s than under 25s have registered for unemployment benefits. Bearing in mind the past recessions have seen only one in three older workers return to employment, can the Council tell us what it has been doing to reduce this loss to the economy? Has Economic Development discussed any special measures for this group with partners?

**Answer:**

The latest data indicates the claimant count for the 50+ age bracket in the District has increased from 295 people in September 2019 to 920 in September 2020. Much like for 16-24 year olds, there is evidence that the over 50s age group is being disproportionately impacted by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This trend has been discussed with Job Centre Plus colleagues in the locality. They operate a programme called Skillsmax which is focussed on digital inclusion and access to employment. This scheme is specifically aimed at 50+ customers and we'll be promoting this via our resident and business newsletters.

In addition to this we have also developed a Redundancy Response Network. Initially this was in response to large scale redundancies at Axminster Carpets and then Flybe. Latterly we have worked with DWP and the County Council to advise on the development of a County wide network. This network will help to ensure that relevant partners can quickly come together to provide a full package of support for all age ranges including the over 50s.

Finally our business support programme 'Adapt and Thrive' is open to residents of any age. This will help to support people into self-employment or to develop existing businesses.

We will continue to keep the efficacy of these measures under review. This will help to determine whether further local/community based initiatives are required to help support people from this age group back in to employment.

**Question 3: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets from Councillor Bruce De Saram**

Has our EDDC economic team been able to evaluate the success of "eat out to help out" in the food and hospitality sectors and from this data are they aware of how many businesses will survive to the next season and are there any more steps we could take as a Council to support this sector other than by the use of Grants?

**Answer:**

Following the closure of the foodservice sector in March, approximately 80% of hospitality firms nationally stopped trading in April and 1.4 million workers were furloughed, the highest of any sector. The 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme was launched in August in an attempt to boost recovery. Data shows that during the third week of August 2020, the number of customers at restaurants Mon-Weds was up 61% compared to the same days in 2019.

HMRC will publish Official Statistics covering the 'Eat Out to Help Out' Scheme on Thursday 22 October at 9:30am. We have not undertaken any specific East Devon analysis yet but nationally the scheme has been successful with over £832 million spent by customers and over 53.7 million trips made. Government pay out so far has reached £522 million, with over 130 million claims made.

Given the lack of local data currently no formal evaluation has been undertaken of the impact of the 'Eat Out to Help Out' initiative in the District as yet. In any event such an evaluation would be unlikely to give an accurate indication of predicted survival rates into next year. To quote the NFU: "As local lockdowns become more frequent, the furlough scheme ends and

national guidelines tighten, only time will tell as to whether the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme has done enough for businesses to survive such unprecedented and difficult times.”

The Council has administered grant schemes that have helped to provide short term financial support to food and hospitality businesses. Looking forward a good way to support both sectors is to promote the quality local food and drink/produce across East Devon. To this end the economic development team are offering support to Town Councils across the district who want to deliver Gate to Plate events in 2021 to help boost visitor numbers, hospitality and retail sector trade.

**Question 4: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets from Councillor Andrew Moulding**

To what extent has the Council participated in the Team Devon economic recovery planning process and what specific plans are there for moving further forward with the Recovery Plan for East Devon?

**Answer:**

The Council has participated fully in the Team Devon approach including representation at the Devon Leaders and Chief Executives Group, Recovery Co-ordination Group and the Business and Economic Recovery Group. A report will be brought to the October 28<sup>th</sup> Cabinet detailing the full range of initiatives that have been deployed to date and the programme of activity that is planned moving forward to support economic recovery in District. This is within the context of the Team Devon Covid-19 Economy and Business Recovery Prospectus that was published in July.

**Question 5: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets from Councillor Andrew Moulding**

How is the construction sector recovering from the pandemic and how has this affected housing delivery? How is first-time mortgage finance likely to affect delivery?

**Answer:**

There is evidence that large commercial and residential construction sites in the District were interrupted by the pandemic. All activity has now resumed albeit that this has also required adapting to new working practices. This pattern is reflected at the national level where the construction sector rebounded more than other sectors in the period June to August albeit that output is still down by 10% for the year. Figures from the Planning Portal also following a similar trend with the number of planning applications submitted in April and May being below the equivalent figures for 2019 but with a sharp increase in June – August.

In terms of the impact on housing delivery in the District the best data source currently is from Building Control and the relevant figures are set out in the table below. Major house builders have reported strong reservation levels but it is not currently possible to say what effect the availability of first time mortgage finance is having on housing delivery.

<b>Building Control Completions 2020</b>									
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep
No. of homes	17	71	80	4	12	55	43	59	65

## **Question 6: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets from Councillor Andrew Moulding**

Congratulations to Libby Jarrett, Andrew Wood and their teams for their efforts in sustaining local businesses – and for carrying out numerous post assurance fraud checks. Can we have an update please – and inform us on what gaps in financial support have been observed?

### **Answer:**

A wide range of initiatives have been promoted nationally to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Some of these, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention and Business Interruption Loan Schemes, have been deployed entirely independently of local authorities. Others have required the Council to play a leading or partnership role. Further activity has been instigated locally to respond to specific circumstances, most particularly where large scale redundancies has been announced. The full breadth of activity undertaken over the last 6 months is set out below;

*Redundancy response* – early experience with Axminster Carpets enabled a redundancy response network to be developed in East Devon such that redundancy response events can be delivered without delay. We are now working with the Department for Work and Pension (DWP) alongside regional and local partners such as training providers and the Citizens Advice Bureau to advise on the development and co-ordination of an effective county wide redundancy response network.

*Business grants* – three grants schemes haven been administered through the Council as follows;

- Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF) scheme
- Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund (RHLGF)
- Discretionary Grant Scheme

In total over £45m has been deployed to over 4,500 individual businesses and organisations with grants ranging from £1,000 to £25,000.

*Rate relief* – over £19m of business rate relief has been given to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses and nurseries in the District.

*Hardship funding* – The Council is also able to support individuals through the Council's COVID Hardship Fund Policy where we have funds available of £192,100. So far we have paid out over £32K with 164 awards made. Most of this funding to date has been used to provide immediate emergency short term support where people are struggling to meet their essential needs. However one of the main aims of this policy is to support our residents in building financial resilience and going forward we will be looking to use this fund to also help with addressing wider support needs; such as business advice and support for the self-employed.

*Business support programme* – a series of online workshops and webinars were commissioned through Cosmic to provide additional support to businesses during May and June. Topics covered included new ways to sell online, digital marketing and the use of social media platforms. Over 150 people took part in these events.

*Business Ambassador* - an ambassador programme is being instigated with some of the largest and most significant employers in the District acting as champions for East Devon. The programme will facilitate inward investment opportunities and will act as a platform for exchange of ideas and opportunities, sharing best practices, promoting local supply chains and East Devon more generally as a great place to do business. It is part of a Devon-wide approach to inward investment and business engagement within the Devon Delivers

programme. A qualitative survey was undertaken in July and August to provide further insight in to the issues and challenges facing the business community and to help inform recovery planning.

*Communications* – a dedicated weekly business newsletter was introduced in March. Important updates were sent by email every week and supported by video/images/text on social media, advertising on social media and website. The email update was issued as a timely response to Covid-19 lockdown, business grants and support, the gradual opening up of the economy and the many changes that businesses have needed to respond to. The number of recipients grew from 9,300 to 10,800 over the period to July. . Since this point updates for businesses have been included in the fortnightly Residents update. A further business update is scheduled for October.

In terms of gaps in financial support the ineligibility of home workers/those without high fixed property costs was a particularly issue in terms of the deployment of the grant schemes. Nationally the ExcludedUK group has been formed to raise awareness of the 3 million UK taxpayers who are not eligible for UK Government Covid-19 support. The following are cited as examples in this respect;

- Newly self-employed
- Those earning less than 50% income from self-employment
- Self-employed with +£50k trading profits
- PAYE freelancers
- New starters
- Those made redundant before 19 Mar
- Those denied furlough
- Directors paid PAYE Annually
- Directors paid in Dividends
- Directors of Companies not in Profit
- New Businesses
- Businesses ineligible for Business Grants
- Those in maternity/parental/adoption leave
- Those whose personal circumstances have affected entitlement to support eg. pensions, bereavement allowance, carer's allowance, students

**Question 7: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Finance from Councillor Ben Ingham**

How many local businesses do you anticipate will close this winter?

**Answer:**

It is very hard to predict with any great certainty as to how many business closures there will be this winter. One source of recent insight for the tourism sector was provided by the COVID-19 Business Impact Survey for the month of August 2020 undertaken by The South

West Research Company Ltd. during September 2020. 144 Devon businesses in Devon responded to the survey. This found that 39% of businesses were doubtful about surviving the coming months including 9% who said without further/better assistance their business will not survive.

The outlook for the winter period is challenging and we can expect rises in unemployment, more business closures and ongoing challenges for the local economy. We continue to keep the business closure rate under careful review including the need for any associated redundancy support.

**Question 8: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Finance from Councillor Ben Ingham**

What are the findings from the Business engagement survey – identifying successful adaptations and sharing best practice?

**Answer:**

Members of the economic development team have undertaken a survey of 23 leading local businesses in order to provide a qualitative assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings highlight that support is required for small businesses as a key element of economic recovery. There was a consensus that East Devon has a unique opportunity to benefit from increased visitor numbers and inward investment. There was support for some form of business ambassador programme with businesses acting as champions for the area, exchanging of ideas and opportunities, sharing best practice, promoting East Devon and local supply chains.

The survey found that the importance of digital infrastructure and local supply networks had been highlighted by the pandemic. It was felt the District is well placed to take the lead in the clean growth agenda and businesses operating in that field should be supported.

In terms of sharing best practice the business newsletter sought to showcase examples of where businesses had successfully adapted to the changed circumstances in relation to the pandemic. The full list is available here <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/business-and-investment/business-and-investment-information/coronavirus-business-case-studies/>.

**Question 9: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Coast Country and Environment from Councillor Ben Ingham**

StreetScene has performed exceptionally well during the Pandemic and the workforce has been exposed more than most to the risks of infection. How many if any workers, direct or contractors, have been infected by Coronavirus-19?

**Answer:**

In the early part of the pandemic, during lockdown we had 41 instances of self-isolation with COVID symptoms, out of 105 StreetScene operations staff. This was between early March and June and prior to widespread testing. We believe most of these were due to COVID like symptoms and not actual COVID, but we can't be sure.

Our Recycling & Waste Contractors Suez experienced a similar picture, with many cases of self-isolation prior to testing. Now testing is in place, those with suspected symptoms get tested quickly and have been able to return to work.

To our knowledge, we had no confirmed cases of COVID amongst our operations staff or Suez staff. However, on 16<sup>th</sup> October one of the REACT team tested positive for COVID which was contracted on his coastguard work and since he isolated as soon as he found out, there is no onward impact to the Teams.

We are continuing with COVID secure risk assessment measures to protect our teams as far as practical.

**Question 10: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets from Councillor Philip Skinner**

What steps has the economy portfolio holder taken in personally engaging with the business community across the district to measure how we as a council can help in maintaining jobs going forward and could he assure us that he, as lead for EDDC's economy is promoting East Devon as a place to do business which in turn can play its part in instilling confidence at a time when businesses have never needed it more, to insure we can at the very least maintain our employment levels moving forward and would he agree with me that the private sector need to be viewed as our partners in investing in East Devon so as we can try to enhance job growth in whatever way we can as a council.

On that note, may I ask how many businesses have you been able to contact to measure these aspirations?

**Answer:**

Launched in March, our monthly C-19 related business updates are shared with more than 11,500 East Devon businesses and residents. This is the largest distribution network we have ever had and we've received particularly positive feedback on content from employers. The PFH has had close involvement (including signing off content) and direct input to this regular series of business updates and provides tailored introductions to each edition. This is a particularly effective method of engaging with the business community across East Devon.

The PFH has used this communication platform to announce grant funding schemes, highlight opportunities for advice, guidance and funding, sharing best practice and successful local business adaptations and to launch our own C-19 business resilience webinars. More recently, he has been able to update on positive steps towards economic recovery. This includes celebrating successes such as the 100 new high value jobs associated with Exeter Aerospace and encouraging businesses to engage with Adapt and Thrive - our newly launched in house business support programme, helping businesses to innovate and introduce new ways of working to increase trade.

In terms of PFH led activity to help in maintain jobs in the district, the work of the Discretionary Grant Panel, chaired by the PFH has been instrumental in maintaining jobs in the most important and immediate way possible – through the robust and efficient transfer of unprecedented amounts of public grant funds into the private sector. The member panel ensured EDDC prioritised support to employers in the worst affected retail, hospitality and leisure sectors while ensuring full adherence to evolving Government guidance.

The PFH has been engaged with the Growth, Development and Prosperity service planning process from the earliest stage of development, supporting formation of our work programme. We have presented and discussed the most pressing areas of emerging work for both economic development staff and this includes a clear focus on promoting East Devon as a place to do business. Our current engagement with key employers is part of our work towards establishing a proactive and less fragmented inward investment network, supported by a group of key ambassadors for the district. This will help us to target messages to high value businesses and provide a referral and support service to potential investors. Previously our approach to inward investment outside of the Enterprise Zone has

been constructive but largely responsive given limited resource. Having recruited a Senior EDO at the beginning of the year with specific experience of inward investment promotion, our work to help reinvigorate Devon Delivers as part of our economic recovery will be beneficial in helping present a more consistent investment landscape and land new, quality employers in district.

**Question 11: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Philip Skinner**

Could the Leader please confirm the position regarding the Council structure?

There was desire from yourself to want a move to a committee structure one which you were personally pursuing with some vigour to this change....in fact I would go as far as to say that you couldn't move the agenda fast enough but it all seems to have gone from F1 to a 'snail's pace'.

Not wanting to state the blindingly obvious, I wonder if I could ask you, as the leader, to 'pick up the pace' a bit just to ensure your integrity in this matter is not challenged as it did seem from my experience that it was 'high priority' and need of desperate debate.

Could you please inform us to date where we are with this issue?

**Answer:**

I am happy to confirm for Cllr Skinner that I stated unequivocally in May 2019 how important a piece of work it was for this council to reform the way it has been governed in the past. This was in my election leaflet too. Under the Cabinet system as operated hitherto, highly significant financial, economic, and public policy directions were being made by a very small number of councillors such as himself even within the 10 out of 60 members on Cabinet.

I was pleased, therefore, when a working party was set up to look at how to change this and was encouraged at first by an LGA advisor to the project who said we should be in position to try and make some recommendations by Autumn 2019. Indeed - in order to achieve change in May 2020 with necessary revisions and consultations in a timely fashion - this was necessary.

However, from the very earliest meeting I and my colleagues were aware that there was little genuine appetite on the part of the then Leader, or the Opposition Group, to implement reforms, and the timetable of work kept slipping. Cllr Skinner will remember this; it is fair to say he was the most generous contributor on the metric of words-spoken-per-meeting at all sessions.

Nevertheless, the group was able to resolve to seek counsel from other authorities elsewhere, and there was no good reason not to have been visiting other councils with committee/hybrid/cabinet systems in the early winter of 2019/20. This simply did not take place, and in any case would have been too late for changes in May 2020.

I was elected Leader of the Council at the end of May 2020 in the sad circumstances of the pandemic, and the visits to councils previously delayed were now not possible at all. It was a real pity that the opportunity prior to the pandemic had been wasted by opponents of reform.

Nevertheless, the status quo was unacceptable to me, so immediately on election as Leader I widened the sphere of Cabinet with the appointment of 5 new Assistant Portfolio Holders, and created the Portfolio Holder for Democracy and Transparency to push on further immediate actions. As a result, the moribund member champion roles were reviewed and last month 4 roles for Mental Health, Armed Forces, Sport & Leisure, and Culture were appointed.



Therefore, changes to the Council structure are already taking place, guided by the Portfolio Holder. The introduction of Assistant Portfolio Holders has increased the ability of Councillors outside of the Cabinet to be involved in executive discussions. In addition, panels, forums, joint and outside bodies have been reformed to facilitate cross-party collaboration. Portfolio Teams and Member Champions also feed into the new administration's desire for constructive cross-party collaboration. There is no evidence that a Shadow Cabinet would contribute to a collaborative spirit of cross-party working.

Next on the Portfolio Holder's agenda is reviewing the Council's relationship with its outside bodies to ensure there is transparency, investigating the potential for hybrid meetings, and bringing forward initiatives to ensure that the Council can be more accountable in its decision-making.

COVID-19 has changed priorities. Once we return to more normal times, it will be possible for the Working Party to visit other councils, which are not advised under the current restrictions. Any change in governance arrangements will need to be made on solid and sound evidence, not least because a change in the Council structure will have significant short-term implications on senior staff and Democratic Services; it may lead to a major reorganisation which would require many constitutional changes.

These challenges would not be insurmountable in normal times, but it would be a burden on hard-pressed officers during a national emergency in which councils everywhere are performing duties never previously demanded of them, from administering business grants to supporting the vulnerable. We have risen to these, but such demands are likely to increase over what is likely to be an extremely difficult winter for East Devon residents.

**Question 12: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets from Councillor Philip Skinner**

Would Cllr Hayward identify any infrastructure schemes that are either being built up or are indeed coming forward in East Devon and how will they help employment?

**Answer:**

The most recent infrastructure scheme considered by Cabinet was the enhancement of Long Lane. An increased budget was agreed to support the delivery of the scheme which will bring a number of benefits including unlocking the Airpark Enterprise Zone site, enhancing public transport and cycling connectivity and improving the gateway to the Airport.

The pandemic has reinforced the importance of digital connectivity in the District. Jurassic Fibre continue to roll out their fibre network to the area between Exmouth and the Airport and also now to Honiton. We continue to support the Connecting Devon and Somerset programme to secure improvement for more rural areas.

More widely the Local Plan has an accompanying Infrastructure Delivery Plan which details various infrastructure improvements required to support the delivery of new development in the District. This includes in terms of unlocking new employment developments with feasibility work continuing in relation to Hayne Lane at Honiton for example. We also have our own capital programme including planned drainage and beach management improvements. Finally we continue to work with partners such as the Local Enterprise Partnership to develop a pipeline of investable projects including through the Enterprise Zone programme.

**Question 13: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Mike Allen**

- a. What is the progress on the Refresh of Council Plan in the new “Normal” we face?

**Answer:**

The new Council plan is still being worked on by Senior Officers, the Leader and senior members of the administration. At the time of writing, the plan has not yet been finalised but it will be presented to Cabinet shortly. This will reflect the new priorities for the council and ambitious plans. It will of course set out the strategic aspirations, aims and objectives of the Council but it will also recognise the various constraints and restrictions placed on us by the pandemic and it will embrace the role the East Devon District Council expects to play in supporting communities to recover as we work towards a return to business as usual.

- b. What lessons for the Winter Covid-19 situation have been learned from the multi-agency workshop and other interactions with Local Resilience Forum (LRF) key partners?

**Answer:**

We have been working closely with the LRF emergency planning infrastructure, TeamDevon, the Health Protection Board, voluntary and community groups and a wide range of partners during the Response and Recovery phases of the pandemic. We recently reported to Cabinet on our Recovery actions. We recognise the value and effectiveness of multi-agency working and have been represented on a range of groups established under the LRF umbrella. This has aided communication, provided alerts and allows for the escalation of requests for assistance.

Strategic Management Team has used Response and Recovery Issues Logs to coordinate actions across Council Services and each Service completed action plans under the framework of our Emergency Plan.

The LRF have undertaken reviews and cascaded information on national reviews with information posted on Resilience Direct a secure emergency planning portal.

- c. Given the wave of infections this autumn include all types of respiratory infection which may mask Coronavirus-19, how are we supporting voluntary work and especially food banks with the remaining Corporate Food Funds and the Covid-19 Prompt Action Fund?

**Answer:**

We are working collaboratively with community and voluntary groups, initially through our Community Support Hub and more recently through our staff involved in community engagement and public health matters. WestBank were commissioned by the County Council to provide support and advice to CVS groups and we have supplemented this through contact with our officers. Foodbanks have been offered support and we have used some of the funding available to purchase food parcels for shielding groups, which we have delivered.

**Question 14: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets from Councillor Mike Allen**

- a. Which East Devon sectors of employment have been hardest hit by Covid-19 and which are recovering well?

**Answer:**

Analysis from the County Council highlights that certain parts of the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors on which Devon is over-dependent have been especially hard hit, with many high street shop and restaurant chains announcing closures. Overseas owned branch plant manufacturing operations have also been vulnerable including the announcement of closure Gould pumps in Axminster. During lockdown the construction sector was also impacted heavily, as was the fishing sector due in part to restricted supermarket supply chains and the closure of the hospitality sector. Uniquely in a Devon context the Airport has also been the epicentre for over 1,000 jobs losses.

Evidence on consumer spending and more widely has demonstrated that following a sharp decline in April – June there was sharp increase in activity in sectors such as tourism and construction during the summer months, albeit that this by no means compensates entirely for losses experienced during the lockdown period. The aviation sector in particular is likely to see a slow recovery and it is currently as to when there will be a return to 2019 passenger levels at the Airport.

A full report will be presented to Cabinet on the 28<sup>th</sup> October.

- b. How many of East Devon's employees were furloughed and which sectors still have large numbers on furlough?

**Answer:**

The relevant figures are set out below.

Area	CJRS (July)	CJRS (Aug)	% of eligible employees Furloughed July 2020	% of eligible employees Furloughed Aug 2020
Torridge	9,000	9,200	35%	36%
North Devon	13,800	14,400	34%	36%
South Hams	11,300	11,700	34%	35%
Teignbridge	19,100	19,900	33%	35%
East Devon	19,100	19,700	33%	34%
<b>Devon County</b>	<b>105,400</b>	<b>109,900</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>33%</b>
West Devon	6,400	6,700	30%	32%
<b>England</b>	<b>7,600,900</b>	<b>8,067,700</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>32%</b>
Mid Devon	10,400	10,900	29%	30%
Exeter	16,500	17,400	28%	30%

We do not have a breakdown for which sectors within the District have large numbers of furloughed employees. These figures have though been produced nationally (see below) and provide a guide for the position locally. The top three sectors with highest proportion of furloughed employees are;

- Accommodation and food services
- Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services
- Construction

There is no reason to believe that the situation locally would not be similar to this as the same pattern is reflected in the data for the South West region.

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Employments furloughed</b>	<b>Take-up rate</b>
<b>Agriculture, forestry &amp; fishing</b>	36,600	20%
<b>Mining, quarrying &amp; utilities</b>	14,800	28%
<b>Manufacturing</b>	1,021,500	42%
<b>Energy Production</b>	20,800	16%
<b>Waste and Recycling</b>	43,700	25%
<b>Construction</b>	769,300	60%
<b>Wholesale and retail; repair of motor vehicles</b>	1,906,100	42%
<b>Transport &amp; storage (inc postal)</b>	424,100	32%
<b>Accommodation &amp; food services</b>	1,693,600	77%
<b>Information &amp; communication</b>	227,500	18%
<b>Finance &amp; insurance</b>	76,800	7%
<b>Property</b>	157,800	37%
<b>Professional, scientific &amp; technical</b>	632,900	29%
<b>Business administration and support services</b>	890,500	32%
<b>Public administration &amp; defence</b>	20,400	2%
<b>Education</b>	341,700	10%
<b>Health</b>	423,200	10%
<b>Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services</b>	474,300	70%
<b>Trade union, religious, political and repair</b>	315,000	55%
<b>Domestic employers</b>	10,100	8%
<b>Unknown and other</b>	101,300	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,601,700</b>	<b>32%</b>

Source: HMRC CJRS and PAYE Real Time Information data and Inter-Departmental Business Register

- c. What are the findings from the Business engagement survey – identifying successful adaptations and sharing best practice?

**Answer:**

Members of the economic development team have undertaken a survey of 23 leading local businesses in order to provide a qualitative assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings highlight that support is required for small businesses as a key element of economic recovery. There was a consensus that East Devon has a unique opportunity to benefit from increased visitor numbers and inward investment. There was support for some form of business ambassador programme with businesses acting as champions for the area, exchanging of ideas and opportunities, sharing best practice, promoting East Devon and local supply chains.

The survey found that the importance of digital infrastructure and local supply networks had been highlighted by the pandemic. It was felt the District is well placed to take the lead in the clean growth agenda and businesses operating in that field should be supported.

In terms of sharing best practice the business newsletter sought to showcase examples of where businesses had successfully adapted to the changed circumstances in relation to the pandemic. The full list is available here <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/business-and-investment/business-and-investment-information/coronavirus-business-case-studies/>

- d. Does the Deputy Leader welcome the recent Government announcements to support skills recovery and how can the EDDC encourage such initiatives locally?

**Answer:**

We continue to engage with the Team Devon approach which brings together local skills and training providers through the People Group. We will ensure that we make the most of new developments such as the forthcoming Future Skills Centre in the former Flybe Training Academy. We are also represented on the steering group for the Building Greater Exeter initiative which is designed to support skills development in the construction sector. We will continue to engage with partners such as DCC and the DWP to ensure that we successfully harness new initiatives such as the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to best effect locally.

- e. How is the EDDC involved with helping the Kick-Start and Job Retention schemes?

**Answer:**

The Kickstart scheme is an important opportunity to support young people in to work through work placements. We are currently working with partners including the DWP and DCC to explore how best to ensure that effective gateway provision is in place to support access to the scheme. This is particularly for businesses who are only able to offer a number of placements below the current 30 threshold required to access the scheme directly. We are also investigating the potential to provide placements within the Council.

- f. How will the Self-employment income support scheme be managed in East Devon?

**Answer:**

This scheme is administered nationally by HM Revenues and Customs.

**Question 15: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Finance from Councillor Mike Allen**

- a. When can you report on the progress with the Covid-19 Financial Hardship Fund policy and how it will help in rebuilding longer term financial resilience?

**Answer:**

We have spent £37,903 to date and made 190 awards. We have seen the numbers increase for October. We have a dedicated resource dealing with these cases so that we can look at wider support needs as well as addressing short term support. Some of these are people have been referred into us by other stakeholders (Citizens Advice, DWP, etc) as well as residents contacting us direct. Ensuring residents are getting that wider need is really important in helping to rebuild financial resilience. This will cover a range of things such as money advice (dealing with debt, budgeting etc), accessing other welfare benefits, support with housing etc.

b. We were £1.1m down on council tax income in May but what is the position in September?

**Answer:**

The position as at the end of September is that we are £781K down on this time last year which equates to a drop in collection rate of 0.66%. Position is improving and this is as the same time of re-starting recovery action.

c. Will Assets & Commercialisation income be substantially reduced in 20/21 and by how much?

**Answer:**

The Council when asked offered a rent deferral for 3 months at the start of the virus, repayable in instalments over the following 18 months. Only a very small number of tenants have taken up this offer and the repayments in part will be made within this current financial year and the remainder in the following year. It is only if these rents or other rents become in default that it will affect our budgets (if debt is written off as non-collectable). It is still too early to determine the impact on our rented out properties but we will monitor carefully. The biggest impact has arisen at the East Devon Business Centre where an unusually high number of offices have become vacant, not surprising bearing in mind the flexible nature of the leases, this will have an impact on the income budget for this property but it will not be material in overall terms.

The Commercial Investment Fund as part of the Council's Commercialisation Strategy only currently involves one property, and the return has not been effected.

d. What effect on our finances will the 100% Business rate relief given for 2020/21 worth £18.62m and how will this affect the medium term financial plan?

**Answer:**

No impact to our finances as this is fully funded by government

e. What has been the impact to date on EDDC income from tax receipts and what is the trend? How will this impact base budgets for future years?

**Answer:**

Council tax receipts covered in answer b. Monitoring closely impacts however recovery has only re-started in the last few months and economic climate is still uncertain so impact on base budgets is still unknown.

## **Question 16: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Mike Allen**

- a. The Council notes and thanks Andrew Ennis' teams who report a very heavy workload in respect of antisocial behaviour and helping businesses to adapt to changing COVID 19 regulations. Since the prognosis for new pandemic waves is not good what has been learned from working with County and other District colleagues to develop and manage data relating to our shielding residents; and what has been learned about our ability to liaise with voluntary sector to supply food and resources to shielded residents?
- b. How many cases of households have you reviewed who are in arrears and what types of household are they – how many have disabled occupants and how many of the arrears cases have working adults in the family?

### **Answer:**

In relation to our own tenants, we are constantly and proactively reviewing arrears and monitoring rent accounts closely. I am delighted to report that our rent collection rate remains very high at 99.56% of rent due as a result of our close and joint working with tenants.

Household composition data will be presented to the Poverty Panel once an up to date analysis has been performed.

We do not have access to rent arrears data for private sector housing tenants, but we are anticipating a rise in rent arrears due to the economic impact of the pandemic and once the eviction moratorium ends we might experience a rise in homelessness.

## **Question 17: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and COVID 19 Response & Recovery from Councillor Mike Allen**

To what extent have Council employees recovered from the stresses of the last 7 months? What can be done to help their resilience with the next wave over the winter?

### **Answer:**

We are aware of the need for active engagement with our employees during this difficult time and our managers are ensuring their communication with all employees is a priority issue. This is reinforced by our work practices and policies that back up our IIP accreditation.

During the summer we did undertake a staff survey and a summary of the results follows. We have acted on the issues that were raised and they will help guide us over the winter months:

### **The Council**

- 96% agreed that as a one Council Team, we have shown the willingness and flexibility required to successfully adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic.
- 83% agreed that our managers are demonstrating the capabilities and confidence required to lead us forward at this time, 6% disagreed.
- 90% agreed that our organisational values have underpinned our actions and behaviours during the covid-19 crisis.
- 91% agreed that East Devon District Council is communicating with them effectively.

### **Your mental health and wellbeing**



- 74% would rate their mental health as good, 8% would rate their mental health as poor.
- 80% agreed that EDDC supports them to balance work and caring responsibilities effectively, 5% disagreed.
- 86% feel supported by their line manager, 7% do not.
- 84% agreed they have enough contact with their line manager, 10% disagreed.

People's top six concerns were:

1. Wellbeing of myself / colleagues due to a lack of face to face contact with / support from colleagues / lack of positive work related outcomes that come from talking to colleagues in the office.
2. Current excessive workload.
3. Lack of staff / lack of managers, need to recruit.
4. Going back to the office building with its high risk of infection (some mentioned air filtration system).
5. Difficult work / life balance (most mentioned childcare).
6. Job security / redundancy.

When asked for any other comments about mental health and wellbeing, the most common were:

1. I feel isolated, I want to do face to face work / see my team.
2. Working from home has had a positive impact / I want to keep working from home.
3. My Manager has been supportive / had regular meetings.
4. I don't have a work / life balance (most mentioned children).

### **Working from home**

- 80% agreed that working from home had not adversely affected their productivity, 10% disagreed.
- 77% agreed that they had the tools they needed to work effectively from home, 14% disagreed.

When asked what would help them work more productively from home, the most common answers were:

1. Having two screens / a second screen.
2. Having a proper office chair.
3. Being able to print / a printer.
4. Strata to sort out system connectivity issues – drops out all the time / goes slow.

**Any other comments**, the most common comments were:

1. My team / the council are doing a great job in difficult circumstances.
2. I have felt well supported by my manager / the council.
3. Regular staff updates / communications / news / team updates has been great.
4. Working from home has had a positive impact / increased productivity / want to do it more'.

### **Question 18: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Finance from Councillor Mike Allen**

- a. Have Finance resolved the CTR hardship scheme issues for working age and how much of the £713,034 budget has been spent to date?

**Answer:**

Yes the scheme was implemented in August. To date 4,429 awards have been made totalling £655,344. It is likely that all remaining funding will be spent by the end of the financial year.

- b. Congratulations to Officers in setting up an online financial support form for those who had been negatively impacted. Has this increased from the 444 requests which have been received? How are we tracking this tailored support – help with Benefits, Council Tax or via the Financial Hardship Fund? Do we know how many were disabled/ how many were over 65? Is the Covid-19 Hardship Fund Policy adequately funded?

**Answer:**

Yes the numbers have increased. To date we've had 756 forms submitted for financial support. The requests are broken down under the following categories:

Support requested	Number of requests
Change your council tax instalment	354
Top up Council Tax reduction	194
Essentials	188
Other*	199
Top up Housing costs	205

Note. Some of the requests from our residents will be for multiple types of support and therefore the number of requests for different types of support will be higher than the forms completed.

\*Other – examples of this includes someone wanting to claim Council tax reduction or needing to make an arrangement.

We don't capture whether they are disabled or over 65 but we have captured their employment status which is as follows:

- 349 employed
- 287 self-employed
- 120 unemployed. Within the unemployed figure this could include those of pension age who are not working.

Additional heating costs due to the change in weather is likely to increase demand on gas and electric costs over autumn and winter. Although it is difficult to predict costs at this time as the local economic situation is still uncertain we consider the level of funding at this current stage is likely to be adequate but are continuing to monitor the situation.

- c. To date Discretionary Housing Payments fund for 2020/21 has been supplemented by Government to £279,520. But, to date you have spent £67,355 and dealt with 356 applications. Can you expect that more of this fund will be needed during the winter?

**Answer:**

As at the beginning of October we had spent £130,381.64 on Discretionary housing payments. We are on track to spend all of this funding within the financial year.

**Question 19: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Coast Country and Environment from Councillor Mike Allen**

- a. How will the EDDC take advantage of the Government's social housing decarbonisation programme and what effect will this have on our finances?

**Answer:**

We were successful in our bid under the Green Homes Grant programme and secured £500k towards a programme of installing 100 ground/air source heat pumps to be match funded with our own contribution.

We will be bidding for further investment in our housing stock as government programmes are launched.

Decarbonising our housing stock will require a significant investment over the next twenty years and our Housing Revenue Account is being updated to ensure that we can afford this investment alongside other priorities and 'big ticket' items such as compliance and tenant safety measures, and the provision of new affordable housing.

- b. How many people have responded to the Wild Honiton project and when will a report be issued?

**Answer:**

Wild Honiton consultation responses received 13<sup>th</sup> October and initial headlines are:

- 272 responses online, 4 more paper versions.
- Honiton Bottom & The Glen most visited sites in the town
- Walking (without a dog) and socialising are the main uses for the green spaces
- Improvements for nature (wildflower meadows, bug boxes, tree planting etc.) more desired than improvements for people (benches, signage, footpaths)
- 60% said access for people can't be improved
- 80% said they would be interested in attending events at green spaces
- 5% already volunteer, 34% would like to

A full assessment of the consultation and a project report with suggested actions, outcomes and activities along with a funding proposal (Heritage Lottery based) will be presented to Ward Cllrs and Portfolio Holders for discussion by the end of November.

**Question 20: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Chair of Council from Councillor Mike Allen**

The Standards Committee and Sub-Committee must be democratically balanced and transparent. Why then are there two Portfolio Holders out of three voting members on the Sub-Committee especially when a Portfolio Holder is subject to a complaint? Why is there not a completely independent and impartial majority of outside of appointments allowed to vote on this committee and on Standards to reduce political bias? Lastly why is the same person always used for investigations when there are complaints of inadequate and partial investigations since this can expose the Council to litigation?

**Answer:**

Cllr Allen is incorrect in his assertion that there are two Portfolio Holders on the sub-committee. The Standards procedure is under review and this may include the size of the committee as well as the potential of independent members to vote, although the ability of independent members to vote may not always provide the fair balance that Cllr Allen seems

to be seeking. At present the political bias on the Standards Committee is in favour of the opposition not the controlling group.

The use of an alternative external investigator was recommended by the sub-committee after the last hearing.