

Dear Officers and Members,

Given the likelihood of ‘Purdah’ coming into force shortly with the impending County Council Elections due on 6 May 2021 this may be the last of my Holsworthy Rural County Councillor ‘Updates’ to you (with the exception, of course, of the regular information mostly related to the pandemic coming from the County Council Communications Team).

Many of you will be familiar that when I first became a County Councillor I promised to do my best to support our farming community in and around Holsworthy. We do now, of course, have a wonderful Agri-business Centre in Holsworthy, something for which, I know, there is a huge amount of pride. Our farming community here is of utmost importance and adds hugely to our quality of life. It is something for which, rightly, we are extremely proud and need to ensure that we look after.

I know that my colleagues on the County Council are aware of many of the needs of our farming communities across Devon and very recently my Cabinet colleague, Cllr Gilbert, announced that, “Devon, Somerset & Torbay Trading Standards (TS) have been working closely with partners (including Young Farmers) to highlight the importance of mental health and wellbeing in the farming community. Last year, the service made mental health in farming a priority area and set out a project with the aim of raising awareness of mental health illness and signposting rural business communities to support services.”

At a recent event over 170 people registered from all areas of the country and even from abroad. A video of the latest webinar will be uploaded for to Youtube for viewing shortly. In the meantime please have a look at (and share) the two previous ones which can be seen on the links below:

<https://youtu.be/pUtmx9cqYOE>

https://youtu.be/S_Zzs0W-13A

The pandemic has, of course, caused immeasurable harm to many. Our part of the world has responded very favourably in terms of requests made to safeguard not only ourselves, but, others and I know that both I and all related to council activity are extremely grateful for everyone’s efforts in this regard. Holsworthy Rural is one of the safest places in the country – and I thank you all for helping make that the case. Should you wish to see comprehensive local information in relation to the pandemic please go to <https://www.devon.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-in-devon/coronavirus-data/>

The 2021/22 Budget round has just completed with Full Council making its decision last week. Gross Income for 2021/22 sits at £1,466 million with Income from Council Tax around £443m; Business Rates retention – local

and top up grant £102m; Fees, Charges and other Service Income at £108m; Government Grants and contributions £813m. With the Local Government Finance Settlement being announced on 4 Feb 2021 the main points included Council Tax – which has a referendum limit of 2% for Local Authorities with social care authorities like Devon County Council allowed a 3% Social Care Precept. Full Council voted for a total 4.99% increase in Council Tax which is in line with many other authorities and especially mindful of the current pandemic situation and possible ramifications. An additional £1.3 million has been allocated to be used in the following way - £600,000 for potholes/drainage; £100,000 for improving street furniture; and £600,000 be made available to top up the emergency funds that we have distributed to District Councils to support our residents. It was agreed that this is a good budget for Devon to protect the old, young and vulnerable residents in our county.

During the Purdah period, it is not my intention to attend (remotely) town and parish council meetings. I want, therefore, in advance of this time and in case I do not see you beforehand to take this opportunity of thanking you all for your huge contribution to our communities. It is invaluable, and, rest-assured very much appreciated by so many. I thank you, most sincerely, for all the support you have given me over the past 12 years of my tenure as County Councillor for Holsworthy Rural. It has been a huge privilege to represent you and I wish each and every one of you every happiness for the future.

With every best wish always.

Barry