**Devon County Monthly Report March 2023**

**Cllr Sara Randall Johnson**

As we emerge from what has generally been a mild winter, I hope it stays that way in to the spring time and warmer weather, and we can all see the back of colds, coughs, flu etc and look forward to a lovely summer!

I hope you will agree with me that there are some interesting topics in my ‘mixed bag’ report this month.

# Bus Fares £2 scheme extended

The Government’s fare cap scheme, encouraging passengers to **‘Get Around for £2’** has **now been extended to the end of June 2023!**

The scheme is backed by Government funding, and offers a saving of 30% on the average single fare.  It’s hoped the scheme will encourage people to swap their cars for bus journeys, helping families save money during cost of living pressures, while also reducing carbon emissions by taking cars off the road and encouraging greater bus use to help the industry in its continued recovery from the pandemic.

DCC (Devon County Council) is pleased that all bus companies operating commercial and supported bus services in Devon have agreed to participate in the scheme.  Full details of all eligible services can be found on the DFT website at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/2-bus-fare-cap#south-west>

DCC will continue lobbying government alongside industry bodies, to implement long-term funding reform to avoid more uncertainty and give everyone access to affordable and reliable bus services.

# Be prepared for the unexpected

**Communities in Devon are being invited to apply for funding to help them be better prepared for emergencies or unexpected events.**

Independent charity Devon Communities Together <https://devoncommunities.org.uk/>  is working with DCC and the [Environment Agency](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency) to provide the funding opportunities.

This latest programme is financed by DCC and the South West Regional Flood & Coastal Committee local levy funding, and is administered by Devon Communities Together as part of its role in the [Devon Community Resilience Forum](https://devoncommunities.org.uk/projects/devon-community-resilience-forum) (DCRF), whose core mission to help communities prepare for, and respond to, emergencies.

**Scheme 1 – up to £250 for communities that wish to develop their own Community Emergency Plan**

The Devon Community Resilience Board (DCRB) wants to encourage more communities to produce a Community Emergency Plan (CEP).

A CEP is a document which helps guide a community to organise a response to a local emergency; from flooding or snow to the completely unexpected. They ideally need to be updated every three years, however some communities in Devon either don’t have a plan in place or are not sure how to put together a support document for their community. The aim is that by providing this funding, many more communities across the county will be able to put plans in place to ensure their resilience in case anything happens within their community.

Once approved and completed, the DCRB will upload a completed CEP to a secure government gateway. This enables emergency responders to combine local knowledge with their expertise, allowing an effective place-based, joined-up response.

Devon’s communities can bid for this fund to help form their own Community Emergency Planning group.

Further guidance and support on creating the group can also be provided from the DCRF with in-person attendance from a Devon Communities Together Resilience Project Officer. <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/grant-funding-emergency-flood-resilience>

**Scheme 2 – up to £1,500 for small scale works and resilience equipment (once a CEP is in place)**

Experience has shown that a wide range of small resilience measures can make a real difference to communities. This funding is available to communities to improve their own resilience with equipment and small scale works, and may range from the provision of sandbag stores and other flood protection equipment, road signs, tools and personal protective equipment, to one off small scale works to reduce risk.

DCRF recommends that a Community Emergency Response Team defines its own shopping list to meet local requirements. Examples of resilience measures can be provided by the DCRF, other communities, or Devon County Council to help a Community Emergency Planning Group consider what might be best for a particular area

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**Fairtrade – directly supporting food producers**

Devon has successfully renewed it Fairtrade status for each of the last 14 years, by promoting and encouraging people where they can to choose Fairtrade goods to support food producers across the world.

Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working wages and conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers.

By requiring companies to pay sustainable prices to farmers and food producers, which must never fall lower than the market prices, Fairtrade enables the poorest and weakest producers to improve their position, and have more control over their lives.

This year’s Fairtrade Fortnight has begun and runs until Sunday 12 March. It is highlighting the urgent threat to the future of the foods we love and the livelihoods of the people who grow them, as they face the worst effects of the climate crisis.

According to the Fairtrade Foundation, food such as coffee, bananas and chocolate could become more difficult to buy due to climate change.

The current financial crisis is also taking a heavy toll on many people who are struggling to make ends meet, particularly so for smallholder farmers and workers, with the costs of fuel, fertiliser and food all increasing beyond what is affordable. See also <https://www.devon.gov.uk/fairtrade/>

**Retaining and recruiting staff**

It is common knowledge that businesses and service providers are struggling to recruit and retain staff in whatever sector they are in.

DCC is has teamed up with**Devon & Plymouth Chamber of Commerce** <https://devonchamber.co.uk/> **to host the**[New Ways to Recruit and Retain Staff in 2023](https://members.devonchamber.co.uk/events/details/new-ways-to-recruit-and-retain-staff-in-2023-8510)**event, see** <https://tinyurl.com/4mkebyjx> **.**

With the region’s job market still facing a range of vacancies, this free event aims to help employers, organisations and charities to find out about alternative ways of recruiting and retaining staff.

The event, which will be held at Exeter Racecourse on Monday 24 April from 8:30am – 1pm, will focus on supporting employers to consider filling vacancies using a wider talent pool of people, how to support those already in employment, to better understand workplace culture and to review how traditional recruitment methods can be adjusted to attract a different audience.

Speakers on the day include Mike Adams OBE, Founder of Purple Tuesday, <https://purpletuesday.co/> who will discuss what organisations must do to be disability inclusive, as well as Helen Hart, from Devon & Plymouth Chamber of Commerce’s Local Skills improvement Plan (LSIP) Project Executive, and Ruth Gripper, Research Impact Manager at the University of Exeter.

There will also be discussion groups on a number of topics including:

**Workplace Culture –** exploring how a positive, inclusive culture can impact your ability to recruit and retain great candidates for your business.

***Differences in our wiring: Flipping the narrative –*** encouraging a healthy and open dialogue around some of the common strengths and abilities to be found in people with neurodiverse differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia or dyspraxia and how we can best support some of the common needs that arise.

**Reaching a wider jobs market: Inclusive recruitment –** how to make your recruitment process more inclusive from writing the job description through to the interview.

**Being a mindful manager –** Andrea Adey from Mindful Employer will empower employers to take the lead on matters of workplace mental health and wellbeing.

**Access to Work (A2W) –** Job Centre Plus Disability Advisors will discuss Access to Work, a Department for Work and Pension (DWP) grant scheme which provides money to help people with a disability or long-term health condition stay in work to do their job.

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