

The government designated Devon an 'enhanced response area', in response to high case rates of coronavirus. It means additional support will be available from the government.

This means that the government has prioritised the 'far' South West for additional support to reduce case rates. It doesn't mean another local lockdown, but it does mean that we have more flexibility to introduce additional public health measures if considered necessary.

Case rates here in Devon are very high which is to be expected since the removal of restrictions and the opening up of opportunities to socialise. The availability of testing in the county is good, and the vaccination take up across all of the priority groups has been very high. All Devon residents and visitors to the county are asked to take extra caution.

Public Health Devon is urging people to:

- Limit your social contacts to stop the virus spreading
- meet others outside, because that's safer than meeting inside
- continue to wear face coverings when indoors in public places
- wash your hands properly and regularly
- have the jab if you are an adult and haven't yet had it. Please have both doses as soon as you can. If you're aged 16 to 18, please take up the vaccination when offered to you
- self-isolate if told to do so by NHS Test and Trace
- self-isolate and arranging a PCR test if you show any symptoms of having the virus – the high temperature, new and continuous cough, or change of your usual sense of taste or smell

Devon could become the heart of a 'Southwest Powerhouse' with communities creating their own power, selling what they don't need and then reinvesting proceeds into local projects such as giving local homes a net-zero retrofit. This would create thousands of jobs and help ensure that the county achieves the goal enshrined in its Carbon Plan, to become Net-Zero by 2050 at the latest. The key could well be onshore wind.

Because the sun doesn't shine as much as the wind blows, a single three-megawatt wind turbine will produce 2.5 times more electricity in a year than a solar farm. And it's not just the cost of producing the energy where onshore wind turbines come out on top; wind has the lowest 'embodied energy' – the energy required during manufacture– of any form of energy production.

The National Planning Policy Framework maintains that all new windfarms must be part of an area allocated for wind development in a local or neighbourhood plan and that the planning impacts have been fully addressed and the proposal has local backing.

Professor Patrick Devine-Wright, Chairman of the Net-Zero Task Force said: "We've set limits where onshore wind can go and most of those constraints were made before a Climate Emergency was declared. So, you might want to rethink some of those constraints – do they still apply? Are they still relevant or important enough to stop wind turbines in certain places?"

Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) has announced that its Mobile Boost Programme, which aims to upgrade indoor 4G coverage in "not-spot" areas, now includes a greater choice of equipment.

The initiative, which is being funded through the LEP's Growth Deal, aims to improve the quality of mobile phone calls and connectivity. It's targeting small businesses and households in rural communities who currently have inadequate coverage or have access to only one provider and are currently struggling with connectivity.

Businesses and households can apply for a voucher of up to £1,200 towards the cost of a mobile signal booster from a registered supplier. The value of the voucher will be dependent on the type of technology most suitable for the premises. There are now three options of equipment available – these are a 4G booster and two models of “signal repeaters” which repeat the outdoor signal indoors. Suppliers will be able to advise on the most appropriate option.

Businesses and residents applying through the scheme will be required to make a contribution to cover the cost of installation. Depending on the option chosen, this will range from a one-off fee from around £200 to a monthly fee for a SIM card.

A £3.4 million package of measures to recruit and retain high quality social workers to help and support Devon’s most vulnerable children has won the backing of council leaders at Cabinet a couple of weeks ago to deal with a significant shortage of children’s social workers in some key areas.

The new measures include better pay for key roles, retention payments, more administrative support to free up social workers to focus on doing direct work with children and families, and expanding training schemes and workforce development.

The package will cost £1.1 million this year – which will be funded from reserves – and £3.4 million in a full financial year.

Devon County Council is working in partnership with District Councils in response to the situation in Afghanistan.

Devon’s councils support the UK government’s moves to relocate Afghan citizens who worked with and for UK forces and organisations, and are working actively to find long-term accommodation for these friends of the UK.

So far, four Devon District councils have offered to find accommodation, but it is too early to say how many people can be housed overall. Councils are very keen to hear from local landlords who would be willing to rent flats or houses to these Afghan citizens, particularly in Devon’s towns where it will be easier to help families settle in.

The county is well placed to welcome Afghan families, building on our experience of housing nearly 50 refugee families in the last five years under the government’s Syrian resettlement scheme. We hope that this experience will also help us to respond to the new Afghan refugee resettlement scheme just announced by the government.

Landlords who are interested should get in touch by email at refugeeresettlement@devon.gov.uk

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