

Devon County Councillor Report July 2023

Cllr Sara Randall Johnson

Another diverse mix of items in this report, where many of the issues affecting wider Devon, they are often recognised as being something which impact our own local communities.

Warning; cheap toys could contain harmful chemicals

This subject comes up all too often as people seek out best value when shopping

Consumers across the region are being urged to ensure that the toys they buy display the [UKCA mark](#), or the [European CE equivalent](#), on the packaging following concerns that the cost-of-living crisis is driving people to buy cheaper but potentially dangerous products.

The warning, from our [Heart of the South West Trading Standards Service](#) which covers Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay, follows toy testing by our national partners the [Chartered Institute of Trading Standards \(CTSI\)](#).

Despite UK legislation to protect the public, recent testing on a toy bow-and-arrow set revealed that the product contained 100 times the legal limit of phthalates; while a fashion doll set was 300 times over the legal limit.

Phthalates are plastic-softening chemicals that are used to make plastic more durable.

The use of certain phthalates is tightly restricted in toys across Europe and toy products must contain no more than 0.1 per cent..

Restricted phthalates are carcinogenic and can cause reproductive problems and can affect child growth and neurodevelopment.

Pregnant women are vulnerable as are young children, who are prone to putting things in their mouths.

Other items that failed safety tests include a desktop fan heater with a counterfeit fuse and inadequate safety guards and an adaptor plug on a set of children's LED lights. This was found to have no breakdown isolation between the input and output, which is a fire hazard.

CTSI's product safety campaign sought to explore the link between the cost-of-living crisis and whether consumers were being forced to buy cheaper products, and if that was putting consumers at risk from substandard and unsafe goods.

They visited local high streets and found that the top products shoppers are seeking to save money on are phone chargers, toys, hair straighteners, washing machines toasters and kettles.

Overwhelming majority of councils want hybrid meeting powers

A [new survey](#) by the Local Government Association to marking the second anniversary of the closing of the Government's call for evidence has found that there is still overwhelming support for councils to be allowed to use virtual meeting options for council meetings, where as it stands legislation says voting must take place in person.

95 per cent supported the return of powers to councils to decide for themselves whether or not to use virtual and hybrid meeting technologies for council meetings. In addition, one in 10 councils had had a councillor voluntarily step down because of the in person meeting requirement and nine in 10 councils said they have disabled councillors who would use virtual attendance as a way to attend.

The majority also said they have councillors who would use virtual attendance to manage clashes with work, childcare and other care commitments.

Government plans to scrap charges for DIY waste

While outwardly looking like good news, the Government stating their intention to stop councils charging for DIY waste at Household Waste Recycling Centres lie Sutton Barton will come at a price.

DCC introduced charges for some DIY waste in 2011, in response to swingeing cuts to local council's funding. At the time it was stated that by introducing charges for items such as kitchen and bathroom refurbishments, those costs would be met by households who can afford to make such home improvements, rather than the wider general public.

The Government's decision will mean that DCC will lose around £1 million income, money used to maintain the comprehensive service across all of 19 Household Waste Recycling Centres in the county.

If the plans go ahead and stop councils charging for DIY waste, it will make it harder for DCC to maintain the Household Waste Recycling Centres service as it is and could mean consider reducing opening hours.

New wave of skills boot camps launched

A £3 million investment in skills across Devon and Cornwall has been announced today with the launch of the latest wave of [Train4Tomorrow Skills Bootcamps](#) <https://www.train4tomorrow.org.uk/> More than 50 boot camps are now

recruiting learners with over 1,000 places available, and demand continues to grow for the training provided through this successful scheme. Courses are open to adults aged 19 or over who are looking to improve their skills and employability. For those seeking new employment a guaranteed interview is offered.



Courses DCC are delivering in partnership with Cornwall Council, offer a range of fully-funded training courses of up to 16 weeks across a variety of sectors: Digital, Technical, Construction, Green Skills, Healthcare, Hospitality and Professional Services.

The latest Skills Boot camps being provided include: Modern Construction Methods, Regenerative Farming, Data Analyst, Digital Skills for the Workplace, Cloud Computing, Digital Marketing, Marine Engineering, Welding, Civils and Groundworks, Electrical Vehicles, Retrofit, Floating Offshore Renewables, Clinical Pathways, Long-term Health Conditions, Project Management, Coaching and Mentoring, Hospitality management and many more.

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