Axminster Division Report March 2024

Covid 19 update:

As we approach the 4th anniversary of the first Covid 19 lockdown in England, on the 23rd of March 2020, it's hard to forget the stress, anxiety, economic hardship for many and a genuine fear that the worldwide pandemic brought with it. It seems a very long time ago that we were forced to change how we lived our lives overnight, often being separated from family members, working from home and not being able to socialise in person being just a few things that the uncertainties Covid inflicted on us.

While Covid 19 may have largely disappeared from most of our lives, we are still reaping its unwelcome legacy of slow economy recovery (matters elsewhere contributing to that) and long-standing health issues.

The disease is still very much with us but reported cases in England have reduced massively, where the official UKHSA data dashboard at https://tinyurl.com/ae98rr6r showing cases weekly cases to the 21st of February of 1839 and sadly 245 deaths with Covid mentioned on the death certificate. Clearly, there is still no room for complacency, and you should take precautions if you show signs of having the disease, see https://tinyurl.com/2s39cs8x

Highway – winter update

Following the very difficult winter last year the DCC Asset Management and the Network Response teams have worked very closely together through late summer and autumn to prepare for the winter season. Because of this hard work and the milder winter, the service has recorded 5,500 safety defect potholes in January, slightly below the 7-year average (5,926). This compares well to the 7,500 in 2023. The significant reduction in the gritting operations mentioned above frees up resources to continue the planned patching operations, again helping to reduce safety defect potholes across the county, but prolonged wet weather in the last few months does not help matters when trying to make repairs to the highway. Changes have now been made to the 'front end' of the public 'report a problem' website, https://www.devon.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem/ . Additional information will help provide inform future enhancements and will highlight that members of the public can add themselves to existing reports, rather than duplicating reports.

Gully cleaning operations have slipped behind programme due to the high number of extreme weather events the Service has responded to this year, as well as a series of unexpected equipment breakdowns. Main DCC Highways contractor Milestone Infrastructure have worked hard to get this back on programme and are confident that all programmed gullies will have been attended by the end of March.

A lot of work has been put into addressing drainage referrals raised by the cleaning gangs. Over 14,000 gully issues have been resolved this 2023/24 financial year across Devon; however, the backlog remains high with new issues identified as quickly as the old ones are being tackled.

The joint trial with Devon's Flood team to place gully sensors in selected streets in Devon is in now live. The data recorded will provide insight into whether technology can be used to inform policy or reaction for cyclical gully cleaning. The trial intends to run for an 18-month period.

Is your food bill eating away at your weekly budget?

If so, a few simple measures can help save money and reduce waste too.

A Waste Resource Action Programme (WRAP) Food Trends survey last year found that despite the Cost-of-Living crisis, people are still wasting food that could otherwise have been eaten.

Food prices remain the number one food concern for almost three quarters of participants, and nearly one in four (24%) reported struggling to keep up with household bills. Yet, food waste is still on the rise for four key products – milk, potatoes, chicken and bread.

Keep Cool:

Keeping the fridge temperature between 0-5°C can help keep food fresh for three days longer than usual. If you want to test how cold your fridge actually is, an easy way is to use a thermometer. If you do not have a fridge thermometer, pop a regular thermometer into a glass of water and leave it in the fridge for a few hours. Try not to open the door as this can affect the reading. It is worth checking as the average UK fridge temperature is set at least 2°C too warm!

Know Your Dates:

Understanding the difference between use by and sell by dates can save perfectly edible food from being thrown away.

'Best before' refers to the quality of the food and your food will be at its best when used before the date given. After this peak freshness date, it might not be at its best, but it will still be safe to eat. You can use your senses to make a judgement.

Here's a quick guide to a few key food items and how long they are likely to remain edible after the best before date:

· Biscuits – six months
· Canned food – 12 months

· Cereals – six months

· Confectionary – 12 months

· Crisps – one month

· Dried pasta – three years!

· Pasta sauce – 12 months

'**Use by'** refers to the safety of the food. You must not eat food past the 'use by' date. You cannot always smell the bacteria that causes food to spoil, so after the 'use by' date, the food may appear perfectly fine to eat, but it could be unsafe. You can freeze food right up to and including the 'use by' date. If you are not sure you will eat it in time, freeze it for another day!

'Display until / sell by' is for retailers' attention only.

Reducing the amount of food, we waste is a simple way for households to save money and reduce carbon emissions. 60% of UK food waste comes from households, having a value of £17 billion a year and is associated with 18 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

If we kept food waste out of the black bin, it would save £2.8m a year in disposal costs. Using up leftovers, making the most of our freezers and understanding use by dates are just a few ways to help prevent food waste, and save money too. When food waste is unavoidable, it can still be put to good use. Either recycle using your food waste caddy (where available) or compost at home. Check here to see if there is a food waste collection in your area.

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