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# County Councillor Report

## Cllr Michael Atkins, Hardwick Division

### November/December 2021

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#### Summary

- Covid-19: Omicron variant & Boosters
- Household support fund: vouchers and funds for essential costs this winter
- Holiday activities and food programme: childcare through the holidays
- Computers for Families winter appeal: please consider donating
- Roman history unearthed in Cambridgeshire: a UK first!
- Contact details

#### Covid-19 Omicron variant and booster rollout

The new Omicron variant is of great concern, both locally and nationally. The transmissibility appears to be higher than the previously dominant Delta variant, but we have yet to see conclusive evidence on severity. Given the huge increase in the number of cases (now over 1,000 per week in South Cambridgeshire), the impact on health and education services will in any case be significant.

NHS staff are being redeployed to accelerate the rollout of booster jabs (third doses), which can now be booked by all adults via [www.nhs.uk/covidvaccine](http://www.nhs.uk/covidvaccine). So far, over 300,000 boosters have been delivered in the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough area, leaving an estimated 300,000 further adults requiring boosters. You can pre-book from two months after your second dose, and will be offered slots from three months after your second dose.

**Boosters are no longer being offered on a walk-in basis.** Although this is popular with some members of the public, in other areas of the country it has led to significant queuing, which is problematic from a disease-control perspective, and for those with disabilities or who are pregnant. **First and second doses can still be accessed on a walk-in basis.**

You may find that some routine, non-emergency health services will temporarily be paused or scaled down, which could lead to appointment delays or cancellation, whilst the booster rollout operates at a high pace. We have been assured that this will be monitored carefully and that appointments will only be changed if it is clinically safe to do so.

All of the previous advice continues to apply – get vaccinated, meet people outdoors where possible, wear masks and improve ventilation when indoors.

You may have seen in the media that a recent all-councillor meeting of the County Council scheduled for 14<sup>th</sup> December was cancelled following advice from our Director of Public Health. Unfortunately the provision in law for local democracy to operate remotely expired earlier this year and the Westminster government has not re-introduced it. It was also not possible to agree across parties to reduce the number of councillors attending to a manageable level. The smaller committee meetings of the Council have continued in large, well-ventilated rooms.

#### Household support fund

The Council has been allocated £3.5m in funding to help people who need financial support this winter. Approximately £1m will be used to continue the offer of supermarket vouchers to eligible

families (typically those in receipt of free-school meals or other benefits) to cover food costs during the school holidays. The remainder will be deployed flexibly to help households with heating, food, and other essential suppliers. Residents can find the form at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/coronavirus/household-support-fund> or can access support through South Cambs District Council (01954 713000). If anyone has any difficulties with this scheme please let me know as soon as possible.

## Holiday activities and food programme

There are places still available for the council's Holiday Activities Programme, which are free of charge for children in receipt of free school meals and/or similar benefits.

There are huge well-being and social engagement benefits for children and young people attending a holiday scheme or family experience, and the Council is supporting them to comply with all safety and Covid requirements. Food hampers will also be made available to families that book through the programme. There are local providers in Caldecote, Cambourne, and Bourn - see online for full details at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/news/holiday-activities-and-food-programme>

## Computers for Families – Winter Appeal

Many local children and families are missing out on opportunities because they lack access to digital services. The Council (and partners) are therefore accepting donations of old and unwanted devices, which will be refurbished by volunteers and given to families in need. You can support this scheme by: donating devices (drop-off points at most local libraries), make a financial donation at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/providing-computers-to-local-kids-for-covid-work> or a wish-list donation at [https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/3FCVZUSB9TZVC?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/3FCVZUSB9TZVC?ref_=wl_share); or by volunteering expertise if you are a computer technician <https://cambsyouthpanel.co.uk/contact-us>.

## Roman history unearthed in Cambridgeshire

Stepping outside of current news, archaeologists investigating a Roman settlement in Cambridgeshire have found evidence of a person killed by crucifixion, which would be the first documented case in the UK. County archaeologist Kasia Gdaniec says “These cemeteries and the settlement that developed along the Roman road at Fenstanton are breaking new ground in archaeological research. Burial practices are many and varied in the Roman period and evidence of ante-or post-mortem mutilation is occasionally seen, but never crucifixion. We look forward to finding out more when the results are published. Hopefully, there will be a museum exhibit to showcase the remains soon, and we are working to arrange this.”

## Contact Details

Councillors and residents are welcome to contact me on any issue which is concerning them:

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**WISHING YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!**