



25th January 2022

Good evening, Mayor and Councillors.

➤ **SSDC DISTRICT COUNCILLOR SURGERIES**

- We are back! As you may be aware, one of the regular things we try to do as District Councillors is to be available to our residents as much as we can. With to cooperation of Ilminster Town Council, we were able to hold our first monthly surgery, for some time, in the Council Chambers at the beginning of December last year. Another surgery was hosted at the beginning of this month and we are glad to say that the word is getting around and people are visiting.
- If you think or know of someone who would like to sit down with us face-to-face and have a talk about issues that we may be able to help them with, then please let them know we are available. In the past, topics have ranged from planning disputes, grant funding to information requests.
- Our next Surgery is due to be held again in the Town Council Chambers on the 5th February from 10-11am, but we can be a little flexible with these times if need be. Please pass the word.
- In March, we aim to return to our previous venue at the Greenfylde School Annex in the Wharf Lane Car Park, which is slightly more accessible, but we will let people know in advance.

➤ **SSDC Full Council Meeting 20th January 2022**

Last Thursday, SSDC held its first Full Council meeting of the year at the Westlands Entertainment Venue.

- During the meeting the Council adopted the updated '***Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy***' which will come into effect from the 4th April 2022. This was part of a periodic review of the policy which was approved in 2014 and came into force in 2015. Key changes included:
 - Guidance on determining the suitability of applicants in the taxi and private hire trade.
 - Guidance in relation to criminal convictions including more detail about motoring convictions.
 - Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) and the proportion that should be provided within the fleet. Recommendations set the policy at 25% for Hackney Carriages (currently there are 116 licensed and 39 are wheelchair accessible (33%))
 - Vehicles are required to comply with the current Euro emission standards at the time they are first licensed, less than 5 years old with additional vehicles checks for those over 5 years old.



- Although a requirement regarding electric vehicles was considered, it was felt to be unworkable due to limitations of the market and infrastructure. However, this will remain under review.
- The Council also agreed the 'Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23'
 - This is a financial support which is awarded as a reduction of the Council Tax Charge (where eligible), this had an overall budget of £10.4m for 2021/22 although it is likely to come in slightly below that figure
 - The hardship scheme budget was maintained at £30,000 for the 2022/23 financial year.
 - The hardship scheme was introduced as a safety net for households who could demonstrate they could not afford to pay their Council Tax contribution
 - As of the date of the report, 41 applications were processed for the hardship scheme of which 26 were successful. This figure may increase as we work through a backlog of applications.
- The Council received a 'Project Closure Report' on the Chard Leisure Centre.
 - This provided members with lessons learned that can be applied to future projects and takes place after all major projects.
 - Resulting from this the Council voted to implement 'End of Stage Assessments' (ESA) for all capital projects over £1m and ESAs for all capital projects over £250k that have moderate to high-risk impact.
- The Council was also informed of the District Council's Executive agreement to extend core funding for Citizens Advice South Somerset and Spark Somerset to March 2023 of £128k and £81k respectively and that in addition a further £7k in the Corporate Grants budget to support SSDC's contribution to the countywide Disability Consultation and Engagement Service.

➤ **SOMERSET WASTE PARTNERSHIP (SWP)**

- As you may have been aware, SWP were experiencing, as a lot of other businesses were, difficulties in delivering their service due to increased COVID cases. Thankfully Ilminster experienced little disruption compared to some areas across the County, escaping the worst of it.
- During this period District Councillors received a daily brief as to what was happening across the county, but these have now halted due to normal services being resumed. Cases of absences have now dropped and missed collections have now returned to acceptable levels.
- Meanwhile, the 'Recycle More' initiative has been rolled out across most of Somerset West and Taunton. The last area to receive the 'Big Blue Bag' which is mainly covered by Sedgemoor will begin to be rolled out soon. That will complete the transition to the 'Recycle More' programme from which we have already seen large gains in recycling across the County.



➤ PLANNING

- Last week SSDC Councillors were given the opportunity to attend a Planning Refresher Training Session. Included in the session was a presentation and Q&A with Heather Nesbitt, our 'Enforcer'.
- Enforcement: Heather has been in post now for over a year and is tackling planning enforcement cases across the District. There is a large workload, with more coming in every week. Interestingly, one of the points Heather made, was that Planning Enforcement is not a Statutory obligation that is required to be provided by Local Planning Authorities.
- In the last few weeks Cllr Hamilton has been contacted about the unfinished building to the rear of Ditton Street. Reports have been received about the deterioration of the building structure and fittings. Cllr Hamilton is enquiring as to what, if anything, can be done.
- Phosphates: There is programmed a briefing for Town and Parish Councils about the phosphates, please keep an eye out for the advert.
- Area West: The Carnival Park application submitted jointly by Ilminster Town Council was discussed at the last Area West Committee. The indicative vote was in favour of accepting the officer's recommendation of acceptance by 6 votes to 5. The final delegated decision rests with SSDC's Chief Executive.

➤ OMICRON HOSPITALITY AND LEISURE GRANT

- At the beginning of January it was announced by SSDC that a government scheme to provide grant support for hospitality, accommodations and leisure businesses in England was being made available to eligible business and administered by SSDC.
- Businesses are able to apply for grants between £2,667 and £6,000 depending on criteria.
- The scheme is open until Monday the 28th February and businesses can apply on-line by following the link: <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/omicronbusinessgrant>

➤ MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS TASKFORCE

- Last September, SSDC passed a motion brought by Cllrs Sarah Dyke and Nicola Clark to ensure that SSDC continues to do everything in its power to build a district free from misogyny and violence against women and girls.
- From this, SSDC is aiming to create a 'taskforce' to help tackle misogyny and reduce male violence against women and girls.
- The taskforce will look to ensure that the voices of women and girls are heard and it is SSDC's goal that this will include all of its female councillors in addition to interested residents and other elected members, regardless of gender, who are allied to the cause.



- Information on how people can be a part of this initiative will be released in the coming months. If you are interested, please keep an eye out.
- Meanwhile, SSDC encourages residents to sign the Our Streets Now petition at: www.change.org/p/make-public-sexual-harassment-a-criminal-offence-in-the-uk which aims to make public sexual harassment a crime in the UK.

➤ **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM**

- The Statutory Change Instrument was submitted to Parliament yesterday (Monday 24th January 2022).
- 100 days to elections
- Cllr Val Keitch Vice-Chair Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset Group
- Cllr Brian Hamilton Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset Joint Scrutiny Committee – first meeting scheduled for 31st January 2022.

Cllr Val Keitch

Cllr Brian Hamilton



INFORMATION REFERENCES:

Links to South Somerset District Council's agendas, minutes and other useful information can be found at the following links:



YouTube recordings of SSDC meetings:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSDst3IHGj9WoGnwJGF_soA



SSDC agendas, minutes and decisions can all be found either through the 'Modern.Gov' application or by following the link:

<https://modgov.southsomerset.gov.uk/uuCoverPage.aspx?bcr=1>



For a guide to vaccinations in Somerset, visit:

<https://www.somersetccg.nhs.uk/health/local-services/health-services-during-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccinations-in-somerset/>



Coronavirus. For information on a range of different support that is available visit: www.southsomerset.gov.uk/coronavirus

For more information on the Self Isolation payments –

<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/life-events/coronavirus-support/covid-19-test-trace-support-payment/>



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Somerset Unitarisation Consultation:

<https://consult.communities.gov.uk/governance-reform-and-democracy/somerset/>



Somerset Waste Partnership: <https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/>

Recycle More: <https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/recycle-more/>

Recycle More South Somerset:

<https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/rmheadssouth/>

SSDC NEWS:



Links to South Somerset District Council's latest news stories can be found at the following link: <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/news/>