

## ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT MARCH 2021

### COVID PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

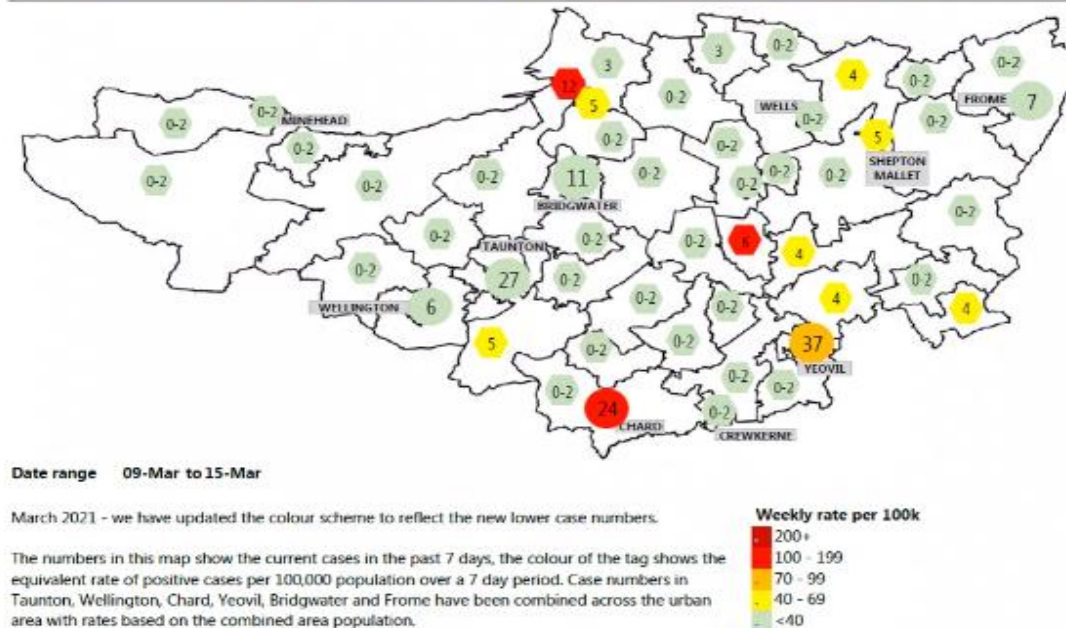
Anyone with any concerns can contact the Covid helpline at - **0300 790 6275 – 8am – 6pm.**

#### The key message remains the same – Hands - Face – Space

It is still vitally important for people to adhere to the restrictions on meeting with others, even if you have received your vaccinations

### COVID ENGAGEMENT BOARD

Somerset COVID-19 Local Outbreak Management Plan Dashboard - Cases Map



Compared to other regions, the SW continues to experience the lowest count of overall confirmed cases in England with the latest R value for the SW estimated to be between 0.6 and 0.8. Across the South West we are generally observing a reduction in case rates in nearly all areas for the total population and the over 60 age group, compared to the case rates in previous weeks. However, some areas are experiencing growth, driven by contained outbreaks in settings as opposed to cases in the wider community.

Concern has been raised by independent sole trader businesses who have been unable to register for lateral flow testing as they do not have a business registration number.

In addition to this, similar businesses have been denied financial support during the pandemic for the same reason. I have been pursuing this with our MP.

### DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

The Fire Minister has outlined how the recommendations from the recent review of the role of PCCs are to be taken forwards. The Home Office are launching a consultative White Paper on fire reform centred around improvements in Professionalism, People, and Governance; this will set the Government's reform agenda, exploring the review proposals on fire governance, which include:

- Consulting on whether to mandate the transfer of fire and rescue functions to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner across England where boundaries are coterminous, or to transfer fire governance directly to an elected Mayor.
- Consulting on how to address boundary challenges, including in the SW.
- Legislating to create operational independence for Chief Fire Officers and separate strategic and operational planning for fire and rescue.

Timings for the publication of the White Paper and the consultation are not yet clear.

## SSDC SCRUTINY

Plans in place to progress with the post pandemic Recovery Strategy, re-designing services to better support communities, and mitigate inequalities. Workshop summits are being held to consider the broad range of actions, and a number of headline themes, are under review in relation to the economy, community recovery, renewal and focus on environment.

## SSDC DISTRICT EXEC.

This month a report was received from SPARK, an organisation which provides information, advice, training and support to charities and community groups, and which represents the charitable sector on strategic bodies at District and County level.

SPARK also runs the Volunteer Service, enabling people to get involved within their communities. For more info. contact Penny Schofield or Katherine Nolan - 01458 550973

A report was also received from Citizens Advice South Somerset (formerly CAB), which is now providing a touch screen facility, on a trial basis, at Forefront, Chard. This is part of a move away from face-to-face work, whilst enabling access and support for vulnerable clients.

The key issue relating to debt at present is council tax arrears.

On a regular basis, and increasingly of interest to charities supporting targeted vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, concern is being raised in relation to the continued shift towards online access and the extent to which this isolates them and makes it difficult to access services.

Museums are on the list of leisure businesses eligible for Government Restart Grants, which were announced recently. They are designed to support businesses as they re-open this year.

**Restart Grants** will replace the previous Covid-19 business grants and payments offered since the beginning of the Nov. lockdown, which finished on March 31<sup>st</sup>. For those businesses which did not qualify for these payments, some discretionary payments have been offered.

Restart Grants will be one-off grants, and will be administered by District Councils, who are waiting to hear whether businesses will need to complete a new full application.

### **Information from the Gov.Uk website on eligibility:**

Eligibility is based on whether your business is:

- based in England
- rate-paying
- trading on 1 April 2021

You cannot obtain funding if the business:

- is in administration, insolvent or has been struck off the Companies House register
- has exceeded the permitted subsidy allowance

For more details see the [Gov.Uk website](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/restart-grants)

## SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL – SCRUTINY/CABINET MEETING

The two top issues this month concerned the Future of local Government in Somerset, including the One Somerset review of the Stronger Somerset case, and the proposed changes to Ilminster and Crewkerne Schools. SCC's planned response to the 'Stronger Somerset' proposal included the results of findings from the following independent assessors:

- PwC report (overall Stronger Somerset proposal)
- Prof. John Bolton report on Adult Social Care
- Trevor Doughty report on Children's Services
- Neil Gibson report on Economy, Planning and Transport Services

The decision in relation to the proposal to move schools in Ilminster and Crewkerne to a two-tier system was also discussed at some length.

Discussion on both topics has not been without controversy, and the cause of much interest on social media. Many of the comments have been without foundation, based on hearsay rather than factual evidence. I have taken this up with those concerned but have yet to receive a response.

For those wishing for more information, and to view the actual discussions that have taken place, you are recommended to access the relevant virtual meeting links.

## FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOMERSET

A mentioned last month, two bids have been submitted as follows:

Stronger Somerset, a joint bid for two unitary authorities, with an East/West, split submitted by the four districts [www.strongersomerset.co.uk](http://www.strongersomerset.co.uk).

One Somerset bid for a single authority submitted by SCC [www.onesomerset.org.uk](http://www.onesomerset.org.uk)

To respond to the Government's consultation, go to

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

It is really important that residents and businesses take advantage of the opportunity to express their views on this important matter.

Response can also be made by email to [unitaryconsultation@communities.gov.uk](mailto:unitaryconsultation@communities.gov.uk) or by writing to Governance Reform and Democracy, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF. The consultation ends on Monday 19 April 2021.

In recent weeks I have been contacted by a number of residents who felt that they had not received sufficient information about either proposal, which I have provided on request. I have declined invitations to express a personal opinion, as I see my role as being to represent everyone without favour or bias, providing factual information to enable people to make up their own minds. Anyone requiring additional information about either bid please feel free to contact me.

## SSDC PLANNING

Concern has been expressed by a number of residents in relation to changes to the method of submitting planning application comments and queries.

In addition to this I understand that a limit has been imposed upon the length of response permitted, which is considered unacceptable by respondents. I have raised this with SSDC.

Making a comment on a planning application:

- You will not receive a reply to your email. We are no longer able to accept and process your contributor comment in this current format. Please resubmit your comment using our online Public Access system. To do this go to our [comment on a planning application](#) page on our website and follow the guidance.

General planning enquiry:

- You will not receive a reply to your email. Please go to the [planning area](#) of our website where I hope you will find the answer to your question. If you are unable to find the advice you need please use our [enquiry form](#) online.

If you are unable to use our online services, please contact our Customer Connect Team on 01935 462462 who will be able to support you in accessing these services.

## HIGHWAYS - A358

The first Community Liaison Forum meeting since Oct. 2019 was held by Highways England this month, outlining the various stages in progressing with the planned upgrade of the A358.

Communities along this stretch of the A358 are keen to be involved and to have their views taken into account. In the coming months a series of further meetings will be held with residents and businesses, with key areas of focus taking into account feedback received so far.

Speeding, and a series of accidents in the area, particularly around Sea and Kingstone, continue to be of great concern to local residents, who I have advised to be vigilant in record keeping as any measures to mitigate this significant problem will be dependent upon evidence. I am in regular contact with highways and expect to have a meeting with our local officer as soon as permitted.

## CLIMATE EMERGENCY FUND

A number of parishes have been concerned that their bids for a share of this fund have not been successful. I have suggested that an indication be given as to why certain bids have not been successful, and to offer advice to ensure future success. The results of this tranche of bids have now been published. 136 bids were received, totalling £3,537,000.

Of those approved - 25 were non-technical bids, totalling £547k

15 technical bids rated gold/bronze were approved totally £124k and £411k.

The total sum of bids approved is £1,082,000

12 of the approved bids were from South Somerset

## **POLICE**

A new Crime Prevention Through Sport fund is due to be introduced on 21<sup>st</sup> June.

Police officers continue to engage with the public, and although the end of lockdown is welcome, demand on police resources will continue. The key message to stay home remains.

Through the use of data insight, it has been possible to digitally track all reported breaches (almost 50,000) of COVID regulations; To date 1,685 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued, including 872 since the start of the latest lockdown.

Officers will continue to act with firmness, fairness, common sense and sound judgement when breaches occur, seeking to maintain goodwill within communities.

It is disappointing that vaccinations for frontline staff have not been prioritised, given the increase in violence, including spitting at officers; policing from a safe distance is not always possible.

It is expected that this summer will be exceptionally busy as people seek to celebrate together following months apart. Work is underway to ensure that appropriate policing plans are in place, focusing on community safety, especially in relation to the re-opening of the night-time economy.

A council tax precept increase of 5.88% to £13.39 per year for a Band D property has been confirmed and will help to recruit 70 new officers in 2021/2022. Additional funding will be used to enhance investigations, using specialist teams, to improve outcomes for victims seeking justice, especially those subjected to traumatic crimes, such as sexual offences, abuse and exploitation. In a recent survey, Avon and Somerset Constabulary had a confidence rating of 81%, ranked as the 7th highest in England.

A recent 'trend', where teenagers have been drinking bleach for numerous reasons, seems to be on the rise and is being monitored closely.

Older church-going members of the community seem to have been 'going out to play' now they have received the vaccination and are putting younger members of the community at risk. The easing of lockdown coincides with Euro 2021 matches, the busiest time of year, and better weather; hotspots are being identified to enable the police to prepare for the impact.

## **SCAMS**

There continues to be concern over a number of scams currently in operation.

One is purported have come from an agency on behalf of DVLA alleging that a car is untaxed. In this respect there is a facility on the <http://gov.uk-vehicletax> website for checking whether any vehicle is taxed and/or MOT'd.

Other communication that states it is coming from HMRC is also bogus.

Parishes and town council representatives were invited earlier this month to attend a series of One Somerset briefings, and then received an email from the following false email address [onesomerset2020@gmail.com](mailto:onesomerset2020@gmail.com) inaccurately stating that the meetings were being cancelled. The matter is now in the hands of the police cyber-crime unit.

One way of ensuring your own internet safety when receiving unsolicited emails is to allow your cursor to hover over the email before opening it, which will then reveal the actual email address.

## **COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER**

From summer 2021 community groups (local authorities, including town and parish councils, will not be eligible to bid) will be able to bid for up to £250,000 matched-funding to help them buy or take over local community assets at risk of being lost, to run as community-owned businesses.

Assets such as pubs, sports clubs/sporting and leisure facilities, cinemas and theatre, music venues, museums, galleries, parks, and post office buildings and shops are all mentioned – although there will not be a definitive list of eligible assets.



## SOMERSET WASTE PARTNERSHIP

At the end of June this year Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) will introduce its expanded recycling service 'Recycle More' to South Somerset. The service is intended to make it easier to recycle more, protecting the environment, tackle climate change, and save taxpayers' money. For those requiring additional info. briefing packs are available.

There will also be briefing sessions in April, for TC/PCs to attend (up to 2 representatives each):

- Wednesday 14th April (6.30-7.30pm)
- Thursday 15th April (6.30-7.30pm)
- Monday 19th April (6.30-7.30pm)

Those wishing to attend should submit the names of those attending which session, and their email address, to [Democracy1@SouthSomerset.Gov.Uk](mailto:Democracy1@SouthSomerset.Gov.Uk) to receive the relevant Zoom details.

## Expanded SAW project



Carymoor Environmental Trust has already made more than 200 visits to primary schools in SWP's Schools Against Waste (SAW) initiative. Reached over 35,000 school children in assemblies and 14,298 in workshops.



- SAW is supporting Recycle More with virtual assemblies and workshop that promote the service as part of the wider 'Reduce, Reuse Recycle' messaging.
- 'Visited' 29 schools in Mendip, delivering virtually sessions using Zoom – a mixture of live interaction with some video content.
- Feedback on the sessions has been extremely positive.



**All 70 primaries in South Somerset will be offered a Recycle More:**

- Assembly
- Two workshops from a selection of themes for either KS1 or KS2

A school 'activity pack', explaining and promoting Recycle More, is being made available for South Somerset schools for children to complete after a visit, to do in the classroom or at home.

\* Details of SAW activities will depend on COVID restrictions.

## Next steps



- **March: briefing packs distributed to stakeholders**
- **w/b 5 April: 1<sup>st</sup> Recycle More Messenger**
- **14-19 April: Three Briefings/Q&A with parishes and towns**
- **16 April: 1<sup>st</sup> Talking Café**
- **19 April: Launch PR/social media**
- **w/b 19 April 1<sup>st</sup> Facebook Q&A**
- **w/b 10 May: Warm-up/6 week Leaflet arrives**
- **w/b 7 June: Pre-Launch/3 week leaflet arrives**
- **w/b 28 June: Recycle More starts**



## **BROADBAND UPDATE**

After a huge amount of work by members of the local community, and much confusion caused by providers at times, Chaffcombe has now been able to secure a contract for the installation of Broadband in the village.

## **CREWKERNE/ILMINSTER SCHOOLS**

As mentioned earlier in this month's report, the decision has now been taken to introduce a two-tier system for the education of children within the Crewkerne Iminster catchment area. This will mean significant changes and such is the level of consternation that plans have been put in place, to raise a legal challenge.

## **POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER ELECTIONS**

The Home Secretary has laid a Written Ministerial Statement in Parliament setting out the findings from part one of the Review of the role of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-03-16/hcws849>.

A virtual hustings was held this month, to which all five candidates were invited, but only two chose to attend. Attendance was disappointing but those who did attend found the opportunity to question candidates very useful.

Local electors are reminded of the importance of exercising their right to vote in the upcoming elections on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May.

Anyone wishing to obtain a postal vote can do so by downloading and completing the online [postal vote application form](#). Once you have done this (note that electronic copies of signatures on the form cannot be accepted), the application form can be emailed to [elections@southsomeset.gov.uk](mailto:elections@southsomeset.gov.uk) or posted to:

The Council Offices  
Brympton Way  
Yeovil  
Somerset  
BA20 2HT

## **SOMERSET DAY**

May 11<sup>th</sup> is Somerset Day and all local communities are being urged to participate.

This year the campaign [#FLYTHEFLAGFORSOMERSET](#) aims to encourage people to celebrate Somerset as a place to live, work, play and learn by flying the Somerset flag.

Everyone can get involved. To find out more:

[DOWNLOAD THE SOMERSET DAY EVENT PACK](#)

[ORDER BUNTING AND FLAGS](#)

[ORDER A CAR AND WINDOW STICKER PACK](#)

## ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

1/3	SCC meeting re: Crewkerne/Ilminster Schools
1/3	Somerset Disability Engagement Service virtual coffee morning
1/3 – 2/3	LGA fire service conference
1/3	SCC One Somerset briefing
1/3	Ashill PC
2/3	SSDC Scrutiny
2/3	Ilminster TC highways & planning meeting
2/3	Broadway PC
3/3	Fire service HR committee
3/3	SCC Children's scrutiny
3/3	Horton quiz
3/3	Winsham PC
4/3	SSDC district exec.
4/3	Data Protection training for school governors
7/3	Isle Valley communion service
7/3	Isle Valley prayers
8/3	Compline
9/3	SSDC Area East
9/3	DSFRA
9/3	SSDC Broadband update
9/3	Horton quiz
10/3	SSDC Area East
10/3	DSFRA
10/3	SSDC Broadband update
10/3	Governor school exclusion training
10/3	Horton quiz
10/3	Ashill PC planning
12/3	Fiveways School curriculum meeting
12/3	SW Employers panel
12/3	SW Provincial council meeting
14/3	Isle valley communion service
14/3	Isle Valley service
15/3	DSFRA appointment of Director of Finance meeting
15/3	Horton PC
16/3	SCC joint scrutiny committee
16/3	Ilminster Lit Fest meeting
16/3	Compline
17/3	SCC Cabinet meeting
17/3	Chard museum trustee meeting
17/3	SSDC Circular Economy event
17/3	SSDC Area West
17/3	One Somerset PC briefing
18/3	LGA Commercial Leadership training
18/3	Fiveways School Improvement Group
18/3	Covid engagement board
18/3	MIND in Somerset
21/3	Isle valley communion service & prayer meetings
23/3	LGA best Practice Scrutiny Committee training
23/3	Ilminster TC
24/3	DSFRA Finance Director interviews
24/3	SSDC Area North committee
24/3	Horton quiz
25/3	Fiveways School headteacher interview
25/3	SSDC group leader meeting
25/3	A358 Community Liaison Forum
26/3	Southwest Waste Partnership briefing
26/3	Leadership in Change Management training
26/3	Chard Museum Trustee meeting
28/3	Isle Valley Communion service
28/3	BHMC/Isle Valley Palm Sunday service
29/3	Isle Valley prayers
29/3	Rural Community Network
30/3	SSDC Scrutiny
30/3	Police & Crime Commissioner hustings with PCs
31/3	SSDC Area South