

AGENDA ITEM 3**ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT NOV. 2021**

As many of you will be aware, with effect from 1st Jan. 2022, in addition to my elected appointment at District Councillor for Neroche Ward, and Somerset County Councillor for Ilminster Division, and associated committee membership, I will be standing down from my current involvement with all other local organisations in a formal capacity.

My grateful thanks go to all of those who have been kind enough to contact me with messages of appreciation for the contribution I have made to our local communities.

It is unclear at present what arrangement will be made to replace my local authority roles as we await a decision with regard to upcoming Unitary elections, but I am in a position to inform you that with regard to any outstanding district matters, District Cllr. Sue Osborne, with whom I have been working closely for many years, will step in to fill the gap. Her contact details are - sue.osborne@southsomerset.gov.uk

In the meantime, where questions, queries or concerns are raised in relation to SCC matters, I suggest that you contact the relevant cabinet members, details attached to this report.

FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOMERSET

The Structural Change Order has now been issued. Having had a number of representations submitted, ministers are still considering whether or not elections for the new Unitary council will be held in May 2022 or 2023.

Other matters being considered are the alignment of parish elections.

It is intended that the unitary council be named 'Somerset Council' and that the new unitary is to be a continuing authority – that is the body corporate of the existing county council with a new name and new membership.

In the period until the first elections (whether May 2022 or May 2023), an implementation executive is to be the transitional decision-making body, with a membership of nine: the leader of SCC to be chair; four additional SCC members and the four leaders of district councils.

There is to be an officer team, responsible for specific workstreams within the programme, driving implementation, with the chief executive of SCC as the Senior Responsible Officer and consisting additionally of the four district council CEOs, SCC section 151 officer, monitoring officer, and programme director.

The Local Government Review Joint Committee to oversee the transition will meet again on Dec. 17th.

Assuming a May 2022 election the new Somerset Council is to consist of 110 members in 55 wards, based on existing county divisions.

A Unitary Advisory Board meeting was held this month, which a number of interested parties attended. Feedback as to its value has been mixed.

POLICE

Community Speed Watch schemes have been re-established in several parishes, with three main objectives:

- Reduce the average speeds on the roads
- Reduce the number of casualties on our roads in both number and severity
- To improve the lives of those within our communities through road safety

If you are interested in setting up a Community Speed Watch in your area email:

CommunitySpeedWatch@avonandsomerset.police.uk

COVID UPDATE

For current information, which is changing on a regular basis, visit this link.

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/latest-coronavirus-updates/>

Several local residents continue to feel that more in-depth data, relating to specific areas of the county, should be provided. My message remains the same, do whatever is needed keep yourself and others safe.

Coronavirus infection rates: As of 29th Nov., the number of confirmed Covid cases in Somerset was 68,307 (18% up from 57,072 on 30th September) and the number of Covid-attributed deaths 927. The rate per 100,000 stands at 435.2 (709.7) for Somerset with South Somerset 505.5 (668.3). The number of total deaths across the County is currently 8% above the 5-year average and the latest R-value for Somerset is between 0.8 and 1.0. Infection rates in Somerset continue to be very high. With the new Omicron variant it is important, even for those who have had both jabs, to remember to follow Government guidance on wearing masks, to continue to observe Social Distancing and to always ventilate indoor areas.

Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline: A single phone number continues to be available for anyone in Somerset who needs Coronavirus-related support. 0300 790 6275, is open seven days a week from 8am to 6pm.

Vaccination programmes roll-out: Somerset continues to have one of the highest vaccination rates in the country with the latest figures showing over 91.3% of the 18+ population having had one dose of vaccine and 88.3% having had both doses. To date 83% of over 80-year olds have had the booster with 56% of all over 50. Work is focusing on Children aged 12-15 years old where the current vaccination level is 49.7%. In total, in Somerset 126,000 doses (including boosters) are being delivered a week.

FLOODING

Since the recent floods, which have had a devastating effect on a number of homes and businesses in the area, several public meetings with interested parties have been held, including a well-attended drop-in event in Ilminster, at which unfortunately no Highways representative was present.

Whilst there is general acknowledgement that there are no quick fix solutions, and that in almost all cases the current situation is caused by a number of cumulative factors, the community continue to be frustrated by what is seen as a lack of immediate interim action until long term solutions can be delivered.

This is not a new situation, and whilst several years ago a Flood Section 19 Report was produced, identifying key areas of risk. Which some action has been taken, there have been calls for a more joined-up approach, and improved communication amongst the various agencies and the general public.

On a practical note, in many cases there are measures that individuals can take to help to mitigate and prevent further damage.

The Environment Agency have particularly asked for details of specific property flooding, along with photos. A report can be created online by using FORT (Flood Online Reporting Tool) <https://swim.geowessex.com/uk> where photos can also be uploaded.

The information will be accessible to Lead Local Flood Authorities, the Environment Agency, and relevant agencies. For more info. a pre-recorded presentation can be viewed at

https://youtu.be/a0E_9IVdFM0 (I found this quite useful).

Alternatively, email floodwessex@environment-agency.gov.uk with any info. and pictures, or to request paper copies of a flood report form.

<http://www.somersetprepared.org.uk/somerset-prepared-event/videos-and-resources/>

SSDC OFFICER CONTACT & AREA MEETINGS

I continue to be contacted by local residents and communities who are concerned about the lack of response to queries, and lengthy wait times, sometimes up to 40 mins. to have telephone helplines answered. SSDC are aware of this and working to provide a solution. Suggestions have been made for a dedicated phone line for PCs and TCs.

PLANNING

Parish clerks have expressed their dismay at the current system for keeping them informed of application receipts and decisions. In response, I am told that 'Officers are looking at converting the "applications received" and "decisions issued" weekly list into a pdf to issue to towns and parishes as a block weekly email. There is apparently no easy self-search that brings this up on an automatic basis and other planning authorities are facing similar problems. There is no single correct approach used. Where LPA's do not notify parishes of the prior approvals it is generally because the comments more often relate to policy / planning application type issues rather than the more tightly defined prior approval tests. As such comments re: sustainability e.g., of a particular location can be perceived to have been ignored. I appreciate that where an applicant subsequently comes back with a proposal for a new build rather than conversion it is not helpful to the parish to be unaware that the fall back has actually been approved. I will look at the scope to issue a one-off parish notification letter linked to the prior approval application type to set out the constraints that surround the scope to comment on such application types.

Re: councils losing out on CIL and affordable housing, this is a long-standing consequence of the permitted development schemes that have been around for some 10 years.'

ENVIRONMENT

Free trees – Eforest work with wildlife trusts, community woodlands and community farms to supply free trees for nature reserves, rewilding projects, etc. They generally supply a minimum of 150 trees for projects but can be fairly flexible. The trees are all UK native species, grown from UK seed and can be supplied with free shelters, stakes, weed mats, etc. If you know of any tree planting projects in the area, then go to <https://eforests.co.uk/freetrees> to gain more info. on the criteria and download their tree request form. Whilst they prefer to work with nature reserves / community woodlands / community farms, they can supply trees for private landowners that have public access to their land.

Reaching Carbon Zero: SCC has commissioned Climate Guide to run a series of free, accredited Carbon Literacy training days for City, Town, and Parish Councils. The training is designed to help local authorities understand actions they can take to help combat climate change effectively. SCC has also launched its new Climate Emergency webpage <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/climate-emergency> which will provide a hub for anyone wanting information about Somerset's work towards tackling climate change including the latest environmental news for Somerset, information and tips for individuals and organisations on how they can reduce their carbon footprints.

BUSES

Somerset Bus Partnership (SBP) are keen increase their community engagement by using village websites and social media links.

SCC have submitted their Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP), along with 80 other Local Authorities across the UK, requesting £163m. of government funding. The following link will take those interested to the relevant document considered at the SCC Scrutiny meeting. It is lengthy, beginning at page 25 – 198.

https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/g1344/Public%20reports%20pack%2012th-Oct-2021%2010.00%20Scrutiny%20for%20Policies%20and%20Place%20Committee.pdf?T=10&fbclid=IwAR0hheR00QGJ04P19HUuUntSk4q-PPfRIOfSaoz0_IlcNxEI5INpN7p5q14

A number of issues are intended to be addressed:

- o Improving the bus service, infrastructure (Taunton station, shelters with real time info etc.) and links to other transport e.g., rail network.
- o Encourage greater use – only 1% of commuter journeys in Somerset is by bus.
- o Identify core routes that will benefit from services at least every 60 mins from 7am-7pm.
- o Improve consultation between bus users and key stakeholders.
- o Improve Customer Service Index, currently one of the UK's worst, to a target of 70%.
- o Transform fleet to 0% emissions by 2030. Carbon free buses are currently cost £400k+.

Focus appears to be on key core routes with little improvement planned for rural communities. Many parishes do not have a bus service at all at present.

Key actions for PCs and TCs –

- Write to the local MP with any concerns around rural isolation, lack of services, impact on people's lives and the community.
- Send Somerset Bus Partnership a brief report covering similar to the above.

The new Bus Strategy for England, better known as 'Bus Back Better,' heralds a new way of funding and determining local bus services.

Once the final Government grant is known, SCC will begin working jointly with bus operators in an 'Enhanced Partnership' to determine the nature of future bus services in the County. By April 2022, these new bus services will become operational.

It is crucial that SCC is made aware of local priorities for bus services: where they need to go, how frequently, at what times, including whether in the evenings and at weekends.

SBP need representatives from each parish to liaise with them via occasional zoom meetings where views on bus priorities can be submitted, and each quarter provide a short report to update them on your local bus issues. These can then be collated and incorporated in their submissions SCC.

SBP ask that those interested provide the following info. to

somersetbuspartnership@gmail.com

Name:

Email:

If a councillor, please state on which council:

Main bus route used:

Special interest -

Regular bus user

Occasional bus user

Parent with school children who go by bus to school

Shift worker

Evening bus user

Hospital outpatient

Disabled

A358 UPDATE

The consultation period ended on 22nd Nov. All feedback received during the consultation period will be formally reviewed by the project team and compiled into a consultation report. This report will form part of the HE planning application for a Development Consent Order (DCO), which they expect to submit in 2022.



SCHOOL PLACES

Applications for school places 2022: All children starting school for the first time in Sept. 2022, as well as those moving between infant and junior or first and middle school applications must be submitted by Sat. 15 Jan. 2022. www.somerset.gov.uk/admissions

CREWKERNE/ILMINSTER SCHOOLS – UPDATE

- High Court Case held in Cardiff on 14th and 15th October.
- Judge dismissed both claims so we continue with implementation

Our perception:

- There is some staff anxiety as we begin the restructure process.
- We were very impressed by the speed and decisiveness with which leaders refocused attentions on next steps and the need to rebuild positivity and relationships
- SCC project team and school leaders are working in a forward-looking manner and engagement has been constructive
- There is more segmentation of school issues – different schools / groups of schools are facing different combinations of risks / issues / opportunities

Timeline

- Ilminster Primary Headteacher appointment process was successfully completed as per the original timeline with Claire Oaten being appointed and Claire will take up post from September 2022
- Staffing restructuring process across all the schools in the area review commenced for staff on 1st October 2021, having been brought forward and is on track to complete around February half term.
- Condition and transition works – summer holiday 2021 + summer holiday 2022
- Admissions – Booklet published 12th September 2021, 15th Jan 2022 closing date (primary) 31st October 2022 (secondary)
- CPD - Autumn term 2021 general support for HR process, Spring / Summer 2022 CPD to meet staff specific needs following restructure
- Variation to admission limits submitted to Office of Schools Adjudicator and awaiting decision on primaries
- Schools funding formula (for census number changes / funding) 20th Jan 2022

Property - condition investment

- A provisional programme of works has now been outlined for each of the schools.
- Some of the works have already been completed at a number of schools, and the programme will continue through to the end of the 23/24 Financial year.
- Works will be commissioned to either SSE or Futures for Somerset, who will design, procure and manage the works. They will be in contact with schools to make arrangements
- The works identified may be adjusted to suit the budget and/or to address higher priority items than may arise over the course of the 3-year programme.

QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE

In 2022, The Queen will become the first British Monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee, marking seventy years on the throne. To help Somerset play its part in celebrating The Queen's legacy, a new website has been launched: <https://platinumjubileesomerset.org.uk/> There are already plans for celebrations across the County, including a four-day national Bank Holiday weekend from Thurs. 2 June through to Sun. 5 June. The Platinum Jubilee Somerset website features information about how individuals and communities can get involved either through the Queen's Green Canopy scheme, by registering a beacon, or by organising a street party.

ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

1/11	Fiveways school staffing committee
1/11	DSFRA member forum
1/11	Ashill PC
2/11	Environmental Health meeting
2/11	Safety training
2/11	Ilminster TC A358 meeting
3/11	LGA Taxi licensing webinar
3/11	Somerset Bus Partnership meeting
3/11	Winsham PC
4/11	SSDC district exec.
4/11	Ilminster Education Foundation
5/11	SCC Unitary update
8/11	SCC Children's Scrutiny
8/11	Neroche School governor meeting
9/11	SSDC Council Tax Support Scheme
10/11	Ilminster flood meeting
10/11	Ilminster Lit Fest launch
11/11	SCC Crewkerne/Ilminster School update
12/11	Ilminster Lit Fest
13/11	Ilminster Lit Fest events
13/11	Donyatt craft fayre
14/11	Remembrance service Broadway
14/11	Remembrance service Ilminster
15/11	Isle Valley prayers
15/11	SSDC planning workshop
15/11	Horton PC
15/11	Chaffcombe PC
16/11	Ilminster Lit fest meeting
16/11	Ilminster Town Council
16/11	Broadway PC
17/11	SCC Scrutiny training
17/11	Chard Museum
17/11	Flood walk-in
19/11	Fiveways School curriculum meeting
19/11	Ilminster Victorian evening
20/11	Monk's Yard craft fayre
20/11	Whitelackington craft fair
21/11	Ashill festival of the heavens
21/11	Horton Stir Up Sunday family service
22/11	Sexual harassment training
26/11	Somerset Prepared Flooding information event
28/11	Safeguarding and Child Protection Essentials
28/11	Samaritans Mental Health training
28/11	Supporting Young People in Crisis training
28/11	Flood Online Reporting Tool
30/11	SSDC Scrutiny