



17TH August 2021

Good evening Mayor and Councillors.

➤ **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION**

- All will be aware that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government recently announced its decision on the future structure of local government in Somerset. Their decision confirmed that the proposal put forward by the County Council was their preferred option. Therefore, in accordance with the timescale they published all four District Councils, and the County Council will be abolished and a new unitary council covering the whole of Somerset will come into existence.
- It would be fair to say that the District Councils were disappointed with the decision, but the decision has been made by the Government and now it is up to all parties to come together to negotiate the future structure for the greater benefit of all the people of Somerset.
- Cllr Keitch will update the Council on the latest developments at the meeting. As councillors will appreciate, this is an ever-changing situation with new information being released each day/week.

➤ **NEW CEO & HEAD OF PAID SERVICES AT SSDC**

- By the time this report has been presented to the Council our new Interim Chief Executive will have been in the job for not nearly 48 hours. Jane Portman comes to us with a wealth of experience, having gone through a unitary process with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole a few years ago when she was then Managing Director of Bournemouth Council. We look forward to working with her in the coming months as we transition to a new authority.

➤ **SOMERSET WASTE PARTNERSHIP (SWP)**

- The Council and its officers will be only too aware of what has happened recently with regards to our waste collections across the town and the district. Due to a combination of well documented reasons, the waste collection service from SWP has not been to the standard we expect and pay for. Missed collections, returning collections, bin and new Big Blue Bag deliveries have been complained about across the district.
- In order to resolve these issues and ease the pressure on recycling and black bin collections SWP made the decision to temporarily halt the collection of green bins from the 2nd of August until the 13th of September. SWP are not alone in facing these challenges, across the country many other authorities have had to make similar tough decisions. However, in compensation, SWP has extended the



existing green bin contracts for 8 weeks next year (6 weeks for the stoppage and 2 additional weeks as a goodwill gesture).

- The temporary halt to green bin collections is one of several initiatives brought in by SWP and SUEZ, which include sign-on bonuses for drivers, retention bonuses for drivers, driver training and the complete roll-out of the 'Recycle More' initiative.
- All of these measures have had an impact, and a recent report from SWP showed that missed collections had fallen dramatically since the initiatives began and the beginning of the driver crisis. Although SWP and SUEZ are working hard to bring the service back to as normal as it can be, it will continue to be a challenging environment in the near to mid-term future.
- On the recycle more roll-out in South Somerset, the initial figures released by SWP show promising results, with over 100 tonnes of extra recycling being collected every week. In the first five weeks 588 tonnes of additional recycling was collected, including 88 tonnes of plastic and over 11 tones of small electricals. These results are similar in trend to what was seen in Mendip in the earlier roll-out and good considering the disruption in collections across the county.

➤ PLANNING

- Planning remains an area of concern, however, good work by the team is making inroads to improving the service. For example, the validation times have been reduced from over 6 weeks in May to just over a week in June.
- Enforcement has been an issue, but as things begin to stabilize across the department, this is being addressed. Extra officers have been deployed to this role to help speed the process, however complicated cases do take up considerable officer time. Recently 3 prosecutions were being pursued through the court system. As of June, there were 476 live cases, which was a rise on the previous month, despite some cases being closed.
- The council will be aware of the on-going Phosphates issue impacting on the Levels and development schemes in the district. As such, SSDC, together with neighbouring authorities are working with engineering and sustainable development consultants Royal Haskoning to find a solution. As a result of this cooperation, SSDC hopes to bring forward a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as well as a range of mitigation measures that developers can utilize to offset their environmental impact with regards to phosphates.
- In relation to the situation unfolding on the Levels, the five councils of Somerset issued a combined statement asking for the Governments help to 'urgently address water quality issues impacting ... the Somerset Levels and Moors' and for the government to work with the councils to 'unlock much needed housing development'. The councils have written to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (SoS, HCLG) and to the Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (SoS DEFRA) 'saying



the issue requires urgent attention ... to be able to help address the national housing crisis.'

➤ VISIT SOUTH SOMERSET WEBSITE

- A revamped Visit South Somerset website was launched a few weeks ago. It can be found by following this link: <https://www.visitsouthsomerset.com/> I encourage you to look at it, if anything just to watch the stirring introduction video which shows this part of our County at its very best.
- As part of the Market Town Investment Group's input, John Goodall and others gave feedback to the team behind the website's creation and offered suggestions for improvement and correcting some minor errors.

➤ CHARD REGENERATION

- Work continues afoot on the new Chard Leisure Centre and is progressing well. The latest update told us that the pool is 'tiled' and the centre is projected to open towards the end of 2021.
- If you haven't been around to see the progress recently you will see a huge difference it is making to the area. The building is certainly impressive and will make a huge contribution to those wishing to emulate our recent Olympic success in the pool.

➤ COUNCIL OF THE YEAR

- On the 4th November the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) will hold its annual awards ceremony. SSDC have been nominated as 'Council of the Year' along with some big hitters such as Salford City and Cheshire West and Chester. In the words of the LGC, 'entrants demonstrated outstanding practice as well as cutting-edge innovations.' During an 'extremely difficult year' the judges were impressed with the high standard and large number of entries from many organisations.

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/>