

ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT JUNE 2021

SCC

In recent weeks the County Council has confirmed plans to invest £10m on public health initiatives and £6m on economic development to kickstart Somerset's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID UPDATE

Coronavirus infection rates: As of 25th June, the number of confirmed Covid cases in Somerset was 20,982 (up from 20,455 on 28th May) and the number of Covid-attributed deaths 799. The rate per 100,000 stands at 47.1 (5.5) for Somerset (South Somerset 20.8 (3.6)). The number of total deaths across the County is currently 19% below the 5-year average and the latest R-value for Somerset is between 1.0 and 1.5.

Even those who have had both vaccinations, it is vitally important to remember, to observe Hands-Face-Space and to ventilate indoor areas at all times.

Road map out of lockdown: The final stage out of lockdown is anticipated to be July 19th (subject to a July 5th review) but is subject to Government assessment of four key criteria:

- the vaccine deployment programme continues successfully
- evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated
- infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS
- the assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new variants

The Government hopes to be in a position to remove all legal limits on social contact and to reopen remaining premises, including nightclubs. The easing of restrictions on large events, performances and live events such as weddings will also be subject to the analysis of the outcomes from certain pilot events.

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 programme roll-out: Somerset continues to have one of the highest vaccination rates in the country with the latest figures showing over 700,00 doses (both 1st and 2nd) delivered.

The take up rates of both doses is very high: 80+ (96%), especially amongst older age groups. 75-79 (100%), 70-74 (98.3%), 65-69 (90.4%), 60-64 (95.2%), 55-59 (91.7%).

FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT UPDATE

The Secretary of State for Local Government is expected to make his decision on which of the two proposals will shape Somerset's future this coming month, before the Parliamentary summer recess on 22nd July. This will be based on three key tests:

1. any proposal must improve local government in the county
2. have a credible geography between 300–600,000 population
3. command a good deal of local support in the round

The decision will also include a clear timetable for moving to the new structure(s) including:

- The process that current councils will follow to prepare for any change.
- Elections of councillors for a shadow executive(s) in May 2022.
- The new council(s) 'vesting', or starting work, in May 2023.

Both the Stronger Somerset and One Somerset teams have been working on detailed implementation plans for several months and continue to do so.

One Somerset have announced the creation of a series of consultative groups, to work in partnership with key stakeholders over the next 18 months to help shape future public services. Interested individuals and organisations are invited to express their interest in becoming involved in one of the consultative groups, by contacting onesomerset@somerset.gov.uk or write to: One Somerset, County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY. There remains some controversy over the formal recognition of the poll held by the Stronger Somerset group in relation to the official consultation process.

FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOMERSET POLL

The results of the poll conducted by the four districts, on behalf of the Stronger Somerset bid, have now been published. In addition, enquiries relating to the cost of the poll has received the following response. Figures do not include officer time spent on the exercise.

COST ELEMENT	£	COMMENTS
CIVICA CONTRACT		
Civica's Fees	£14,820	Civica's costs total £314,825 across the four district councils. Each council has a separate contract with Civica for delivery of the poll within its area.
Printing costs	£12,320	
Postage and mail processing	£65,210	
	£92,350	
LEGAL ADVICE		
Sharpe Prichard	£954	The cost of legal fees totals £8,150. Each council picks up part of the cost in line with its percentage share of the total electorate in all four districts. SSDC's share is 30.27%.
James Goudie QC	£999	
Bevan Brittan	£515	
	£2,467	
TOTAL COST FOR SSDC	£94,817	NB: we are expecting one more invoice from James Goudie QC for further advice received regarding the leaflet

RESULT		1 to elect
One council for Somerset ("One Somerset" – the plan for a single council proposed by Somerset County Council)	11,872	
Two councils for Somerset: Eastern Somerset and Western Somerset ("Stronger Somerset" the plan for two councils for Somerset – an Eastern and a Western Somerset council – proposed by South Somerset District Council and the other district councils of Somerset)	24,114	ELECTED

Number of eligible voters		132,435
Votes cast by post:	24,796	
Votes cast online:	11,360	
Total number of votes cast:		36,156
Turnout:		27.3%
Number of votes found to be invalid:		170
Total number of valid votes to be counted:		35,986

Notes:

The breakdown in the number of votes found to be invalid is as follows:

145	Blank Papers
24	Spoilt Papers
1	Rejected – Unverifiable due to missing security numbers

A further 13 attempted duplicate votes were submitted, were rejected, and are not included in the above calculations.

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ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVIEW

The boundary review, long overdue, is currently underway to more accurately reflect current population figures. Whilst no decision has yet been taken, timetable for this is set out below. The current recommendation is for the Yeovil constituency to be slightly reduced in size.

Expected timetable in England

Date	Action
2 March 2020	The electorate to be used for the review is that at this date
8 June 2021	Publication of initial proposals
8 June to 2 August 2021	Initial consultation period (8 weeks)
March 2022	Secondary consultation period, including public hearings (6 weeks)
September 2022	Publication of revised proposals
September 2022	Final consultation period (4 weeks)
June 2023 (no later than 1 July 2023)	Final proposals submitted to the Speaker
2nd half of 2023	Order in Council bringing new constituencies into place

SSDC CEO

Following the departure of the CEO at the end of this month, the person appointed to take over the helm, an internal appointment, has decided not to take up the post. Given the likely changes to local government structure, it has been decided to appoint an interim CEO. The post has now been advertised, with a number of applications received, and interviews due to take place on the 5th July.

In the meantime, Nicola Hix, Director of Strategy and Support Services, has authorisation to take delegated decisions, but has not been appointed as Deputy CEO.

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE (DSFRS)

At this month's AGM, Sara Randall-Johnson was re-appointed Chair of the authority. I have been appointed to the Audit & Governance Committee and the Appeals Committee. It was reported that DSFRS were a key partner in the planning and delivery of a multi-agency response to the recent G7 Summit in Cornwall.

Forum meetings held this month gained agreement for the four key strategic priorities.

- 1) **Prevention and Protection** - targeted prevention and protection activities to reduce risks in communities, Improving Health, Safety and wellbeing, supporting the local economy.
- 2) **Emergency response** - Operational resources to provide effective emergency response to meet local/national risks identified in the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).
- 3) **Great place to work** – to be recognised as a great place to work, where staff feel valued, supported, safe and well trained to deliver a high performing fire and rescue service
- 4) **Open and Accountable** - using resources efficiently to deliver a high performing, sustainable service that demonstrates improving public value

SCC - Special Educational Needs Survey: Parents, carers, children, young people and practitioners are being asked to complete a short confidential survey to help shape services for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Given the number of concerns recently raised with me in relation to the service, it is important for all of those involved to express their views.

The survey will close on Friday 9 July. www.somerset.gov.uk/360survey

SCC - Somerset levels – Climate: A new web-based app, has been created as part of the Adapting the Levels project to help local people turn individual ideas into plans for collective action, focusing particularly on the challenges of flooding and drought.

Draft pathways, created in conjunction with SCC, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Parish and Town councils, businesses and communities, are available to explore online. Everyone is invited to comment www.adaptingthelevels.co.uk

SCC - Children & Young People: A ten-year programme has been set up to deliver a new way of working to address the needs of the most complex children and young people who are cared for by SCC. 10 new small homes will be set up, linked to foster carers and therapeutic education to provide a collaborative service and a more stable home environment, with the opportunity to live with a family when they are ready and to provide all-encompassing support to meet individual needs.

SCC - Young Somerset: A new social enterprise shop, called Bold & Brave, which aims to help vulnerable young people boost their employability and life skills is to open in Taunton. This is the result of collaboration between Young Somerset and sen.se (Special Educational Needs.Somerset Expertise) and will be based at 14 Riverside Place. It will offer a platform for young people to develop products, learn about business, and gain work experience, including accredited training. They will also be part of a work placement programme, receiving mentoring and job coaching.

SSDC HOUSING BRIEFING

A member briefing was held in relation to the Accelerated Housing Delivery Programme and Affordable Housing. Those wishing for further information please contact me.

In relation to homeless provision, an update was received concerning some popular myths about homeless people. It should be noted that SSDC has no duty to house those who make themselves intentionally homeless, even if there are children involved. In order to obtain a place on the housing list it is necessary to have a connection with the area.

In South Somerset there are currently 9 people on the homeless register, and 9,269 people on the Homefinder register at present; largely made up of those in housing but wishing to find alternative accommodation.

Of these, 4678 are wanting 1 bed accommodation; 2926 – 2 beds; 32 – needing 6 beds.

It is expected that post-Covid, there will be a significant increase in activity from Sept., once furlough and Universal Credit uplift ceases, in addition to an embargo on evictions at present. Households at risk are expected to triple, which includes those in private rented accommodation and those with mortgages.

SDDC have improved web access, to accommodate the way in which many people prefer to engage with the system and find out information. Additional staff have been recruited to take into account the anticipated increase in case load, in conjunction with extra support for food banks and the CAB.

PHOSPHATES UPDATE

I have received the following in response to queries raised in relation to the current position. 'The types of applications caught up by the phosphate issue include outline and full applications that had been resolved to approve at the area committees and Regulation Committee, but where the issue of the decision was held up pending completion of a Section 106 Agreement and reserved matters applications which were under consideration but not determined at the time of the Natural England letter last August. Currently SSDC have outline, full and reserved matters applications for approx. 4,000 dwellings which are impacted by the need to find phosphate mitigation solutions.'

ILMINSTER PARKING/TRAFFIC

Ashcombe lane

In response to concerns raised relating to parking issues in the vicinity of Ashcombe Lane and Ashcombe Lodge, Ilminster TC has been in discussion with both the management of Ashcombe Court and with Mr Palmer. I have been advised that ITC is inclined to support the introduction of measures that might assist the situation. There appears to be no one scenario that would suit residents. In order for any changes to take place, Somerset Highways require consensus from residents about what and how issues will be addressed. Ashcombe Court Management have agreed to send a document to all their residents to ascertain what action is wanted. Once this information is received ITC will decide on their approach to Highways. Without the support of at least 75% of the residents in an area it is unlikely that any changes will be introduced.

HIGHWAYS – ROAD CLOSURES

There has been some correspondence with Highways recently relating to extended road closures and accompanying signage, and the conduct of contractors towards motorists. This has been raised with Highways, and questions asked in relation to ensuring that contractual conditions are complied with, and the process involved in handling breaches.

WASTE COLLECTION/RECYCLING

I have received a number of complaints this month in relation to the non-collection of garden waste, which took some time to resolve. The roll out of the 're-cycle more' scheme has also caused some confusion amongst residents in relation to revised waste collection days, resulting in bins being put out on the wrong day. Some residents have also not yet received their 'blue bags'.

The delays to scheduled pick-up services, have been largely due to a national HGV driver shortage and other pressures, including continued heavy loads and traffic congestion hotspots. The situation has been made worse by Covid (resulting in an HGV driving test backlog) and drivers moving back to EU countries as a result of Brexit.

Rubbish and paid-for garden waste collections have been prioritised to clear the backlog of recycling, including the temporary introduction of Saturday collections.

Somerset's recycling sites also take all kerbside materials and garden waste for recycling, except food waste, which can be double-bagged and put in the Energy from Waste (EFW) skip, as can black bag rubbish; bags may be opened to check for recyclables.

Locally there is also a more general shortage of agency staff, plus heavy holiday traffic and congestion and continued heavier than normal loads.

Concern has also been raised about the presence of a large number of waste bins at Wharf Lane/Silver Street which is restricting pedestrian access to the footpath.

Any problems can be reported to www.somersetwaste.gov.uk and also for the following:

- Request a new or replacement recycling container
- Report a missed collection
- Make a comment or complaint
- Request a garden waste bin or sacks
- Request a clinical, bulky or assisted collection
- Request removal of a rubbish or garden waste bin
- Request a recycling centre permit

ENVIRONMENT

Green Ilminster have been active recently, focusing on the natural environment in the town. There has been a good level of public engagement. One issue which emerged has been the use of herbicides by local authorities.

As a result, the council has been asked to consider:

- Use of herbicides amid concerns surrounding Roundup and similar products and their impact upon human health and biodiversity, where some local authorities are changing their “weed” management arrangements.
- The need to remove all “wild” living grasses and flowers from public areas, as currently, spraying is not selective, killing ferns on walls as well as small wildflowers.
- Staff training relating to biodiversity and climate emergencies, and helped to think “green”.

FLOODING

In response to the recent flash flooding, which has caused significant devastation to a number of properties and businesses, particularly in the Chard area, action teams from SCC, SSDC and the police, were rapidly put into place to provide support to residents and businesses, with a help centre established at the Guildhall in Chard. Up to date information be found at <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/news/2021/6/south-somerset-district-council-establishes-help-and-information-centre-in-chard-following-floods/>

If you are aware of anyone who has been similarly affected by heavy rainfall, particularly the vulnerable, and who may need help, please SSDC know or urge them to contact us via the website or phone 01935 462462.

Highways, supported by SSDC, have cleared mud and debris from affected roads, but although all main routes are now clear significant damage has been caused to some local roads making them impassable. Crews are continuing to assess the widespread storm damage and plan repairs, but the situation is changeable and this is likely to increase. Drivers are urged to travel with caution on minor roads and to report defects or possible road closure sites to countyroads-south@somerset.gov.uk. If the problem is urgent or poses a danger to the public call the police on 101.

SSDC COMMUNICATION & IT

This month, the planned upgrade of the IT function at SSDC resulted in a number of problems experienced, lasting several days, by elected members and those wanting to access online sites. This has now been largely resolved, but I continue to receive complaints from local residents in terms of ease of access to several areas of operation, including planning and enforcement reporting.

Both elected members and members of the general public continue to contact me to raise concerns over the ongoing difficulty in being able to make contact with officers.

BUSES

The Somerset Bus Partnership continues to be active and have written to SCC, welcoming its decision to follow the Government's National Bus Strategy, and publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) by the end of October 2021.

The group has contacted local users and potential users. There is an expectation that this could be the start of a change in the way that local public transport could provide a shift away from car usage. It is intended that there be a collaborative process to develop plans, with opportunities for engagement and consultation with a range of interested parties and stakeholders. Initial plans need to be submitted within a tight timescale so at present the engagement process will need to reflect the time constraints. The Government has called for innovative ideas, particularly in rural areas, and the group is in touch with many local parish and town Councils to gather ideas to put forward. Contact tony.reese@mail.com

HIGHWAYS ENGLAND A358 DUALLING

The Community Forum Meeting held this month, attended by 8 parish councils, was Chaired by a newly appointed independent Chair, Sue Manns. An update on plans was received, and attendees were given the opportunity to put forward their own proposed amendments; this was largely done by agreement between those communities most affected along the route. Overall, it is felt that there are still a number of key concerns relating to specific routes, access points, diversions and the impact of traffic volume and flow in relation to local access and through routes, particularly at Southfields roundabout.

3. Update since the last forum

- We reviewed all the feedback that we received across the week of forums in May.
- Since the last forum, we have been working to consider potential design changes and options to address the concerns raised previously. This process includes assessing the feasibility of some of the things that you have suggested, and speaking to landowners who may potentially be impacted by any of these design changes.
- We have also held a series of 1-2-1 and small group meetings with stakeholders across the route to discuss their concerns further and to get feedback on potential design changes.
- We will be showing these design changes to you today, and seeking your feedback. Some of you who attended these 1-2-1 meetings may have seen some of the things we are presenting today previously.
- A group of 8 parish councils have since presented us (14 June) with their formal position on the scheme between Mattock's Tree Green to Southfields. We are currently undertaking a detailed review of these proposals and will formally respond once this review is complete. These proposals include a suggestion for a 'left-in left-out' priority junctions.

Ongoing commitment to engagement

Date	Milestone	Purpose
TBC	WCHR forum 2	Latest update on WCHR design and a further chance to provide feedback.
June and July	Community engagement, consideration of feedback and further design updates	Meetings with stakeholders to discuss further potential design changes.
8 July	Formal response to joint parish councils proposals	We will formally respond to the proposals that we have received from a group of joint parishes.
TBC	Community forum 4	An update ahead of statutory consultation.
Autumn	Statutory consultation	Anticipated beginning of public consultation. Formal opportunity for you to have your say

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BROADBAND

There remains some dissatisfaction in relation to progress with broadband, particularly in rural villages. For example, Gigaclear did install fibre cables and pots in Dowlish Wake, but they remain unconnected. Enquiries to Connecting Devon and Somerset remain unanswered, and it remains unclear who is now responsible for ownership and taking the initiative forward.

KICKSTART SCHEME

SSDC is offering up to 30 employment opportunities, on six-month contracts, to young people facing unemployment through the Government's Kickstart Scheme, which is available to help young people aged 16-24, currently in receipt of Universal Credit, to get jobs and gain experience. The scheme supports HM Government's Plan for Jobs campaign. SSDC is planning to employ 30 young people on six-month contracts through the scheme. To support long term employability, SSDC will run a learning and development programme in support of workplace opportunities and mentoring.

The scheme provides a stepping-stone to permanent jobs and potential future employment opportunities.

To find out more visit www.gov.uk/government/collections/kickstart-scheme.

Those interested in becoming a Kickstart apprentice can visit their local Job Centre Plus office, go to www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus or kickstart@southsomerset.gov.uk.

CREWKERNE/ILMINSTER SCHOOLS

At the meeting held this month with officers and stakeholders, the timeline for action was agreed. Those requiring more information please contact me for details.

HR

- Joint Working Group (JWG) being formed to facilitate the Head Teacher appointment process for the Iminster Primary School. Independent Chair being appointed jointly by LA & Diocese to oversee process
- Meetings held with key parties within the Iminster schools to share and agree timeline and process – final details of selection process to be agreed by JWG
- Looking to initiate formal process 15th June 2021
- Outcome of process will be known and communicated to key parties before end of Summer term – post to commence 1st January 2022
- Staff video published for all staff across CISP to reduce anxieties
- Staff Q&A session for Maiden Beech Academy 16th June – unions invited.

VILLAGE AGENT

The new village agent is Ellie Brunt, who can be contacted eleanorb@somersetccc.org.uk or on 07985 680 228. She is able to assist with a range of services on behalf of vulnerable local residents who may require support. Third parties may also make referrals by accessing the form below for completion.

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=6rDslanzbkKlaMTvMrikz7A6USUAjrhPi_ALDxfXEIRURDg0U1IMVjhMSkFaNVBPVEo1RkhCSUM1Vi4u

FIVEWAYS SCHOOL

I have been appointed to the role of Equality & Diversity Lead, in addition to being the joint Chair of the Curriculum sub-committee.

CHARD MUSEUM

As Covid restrictions begin to lift, Chard Museum opened to the public this week, for pre-booked tours at the moment. As a trustee of the museum, I have also been appointed to be the Safeguarding Lead.

To support the launch of Culturally Chard, the museum is hosting a presentation, at The Choughs, on July 10th, from 19:30 to 21:00 by Andrew Powell-Thomas on the Taunton Stop Line. To find out more and book tickets go to <https://www.chardmuseum.co.uk/events-2>
Any Museum member who buys a ticket will receive a voucher for a drink to enjoy during the presentation.

FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

Many groups and organisations have begun to revert back to face-to-face meetings, some of which I have been able to attend this month. I am concerned that in some instances the appropriate social distancing and precautionary measures have not been sufficiently vigilant; specifically, track and trace, sanitisation of people and/or surfaces, and the wearing of masks. For the time being I will, where possible, assess individual situations prior to agreeing further face-to-face meeting attendance.

ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

1/6	SSDC Scrutiny
1/6	Broadway PC
3/6	SSDC DX
4/6	SSDC CEO
6/6	Ashill communion
6/6	Isle Valley payers
7/6	Isle Valley prayers
7/6	Horton resident health meeting
7/6	SCC schools stakeholder meeting
7/6	DSFRA
8/6	Lit. fest poetry competition
9/6	Chard museum
9/6	SW Assoc. for leaders in Special Schools Conf.
9/6	Horton quiz
10/6	Neroche School Governor visit
11/6	Fiveways curriculum committee
12/6	Wells charity meeting
13/6	Broadway communion
14/6	Isle Valley prayers
14/6	Poetry competition – Wadham entries
14/6	Resident planning meeting
15/6	Chard museum
15/6	DSFRA forum
15/6	ILF trustee meeting
16/6	Isle Valley prayers
16/6	Chard museum
16/6	DSFRA forum
16/6	MINDline meeting
16/6	SSE – Governor school exclusion training
17/6	SSDC Members planning workshop
17/6	Horton resident concerns
17/6	Chard museum
17/6	Boundary Commission review
18/6	SSDC Homelessness update
18/6	DSFRA forum
19/6	Samaritans SW regional conference
20/6	Horton church partnership family service
21/6	Neroche school governor meeting
22/6	Chard museum
22/6	Winsham Jubilee Hall AGM
22/6	Knowle St. Giles annual meeting
23/6	Chard museum
23/6	Highways England community forum
24/6	Mind in Somerset
24/6	Ilminster Lit Fest.
24/6	Safeguarding training
25/6	Uffculme Academy Trust meeting + Regional Schools Commissioner
26/6	Winsham open gardens
26/6	Whitelackington VH
26/6	Ilminster Experience
27/6	United benefice service
27/6	Isle Valley evening service
28/6	Chard museum
28/6	School peer-on-peer abuse training
29/6	DSFRA AGM
29/6	Donyatt VH AGM
30/6	SW Heritage training