

ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT DECEMBER 2020

In the run up to Christmas, activity has been relatively quiet compared with recent months. Where important announcements have been issued, particularly in relation to changing Covid-19 restrictions, I have aimed to communicate them promptly on an ongoing basis.

COVID PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

Cases continue to rise, along with concern over the impact of the new strain and Somerset is now in Tier 4.

A testing site is to be set up in Chard.

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

The Somerset Covid Vaccination Programme has joined up with Spark Somerset to ask for volunteers to greet and direct people attending vaccinations centres. If you may be able to help, the link below takes you to Spark a Change, the volunteering platform for Somerset where you can submit your expression of interest. Email volunteer@sparksomerset.org.uk

Locally, The Meadows Surgery, Canal Way, Ilminster, is to be used as the vaccination hub. This was due to begin last week but has been delayed. Information from their website states:

‘We are currently working together with our local health and care providers to develop a detailed Somerset-wide plan to deliver the vaccinations in a safe and effective way for the priority groups identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Please do not contact the surgery directly – you will be contacted when it is time to have your vaccination.’ More information on the vaccination programme is available at:

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

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/?priority-taxon=774cee22-d896-44c1-a611-e3109cce8eae>

Food parcels and vouchers for £15 per week were distributed by some local schools for use during the school holidays, to ease the financial challenges face by many families.

The government is also expected to announce Covid catch up grants for schools.

The Somerset Covid-19 Outbreak Management link is:

docs.somerset.gov.uk/wl/?id=cwwiCDvrJwOacrno4qvVuSxWMVb1yLfH

What does tier 4 mean?

Under tier 4 restrictions, non-essential shops, hairdressers, and leisure and entertainment venues must close, with a new “stay at home” message introduced.

People who need to travel for education or childcare are exempt, and exercise is unlimited.

Where people cannot work from home, they will still be able to travel to work.

Under the measures, households are not allowed to mix, but one person is allowed to meet with one other person outside in a public space. Support bubbles and those meeting for childcare are exempt.

Those who are deemed clinically extremely vulnerable should not go to work and should limit time outside of their homes.

Tier 4 residents must not stay overnight away from home and cannot travel abroad.

This link gives more details about Tier 4 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tier-4-stay-at-home>

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

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

Consideration is being given to the upcoming budget for 2021/2022. There is likely to be a need for £6m. savings, taking into account the impact of lost business rate receipts and also a significant increase in demands for children's and adult's social care services.

SOUTH WEST COUNCILS

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has published the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2021/22. This includes extra money to meet COVID-19 costs, new funding for adult and children's social care and for councils with responsibility for services such as homelessness, planning, recycling and refuse collection.

New measures have also been announced to help councils enable the delivery of 300,000 homes a year across England by the mid-2020s. A housing need formula is currently used to provide a starting point in the process of local planning for new homes. An updated method will now be introduced, prioritising brownfield sites and urban areas, encouraging more homes to be built in the 20 largest cities and urban centres.

The government also intends to revise the so-called '80/20 rule' which guides how much funding is available to local areas to help build homes.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plan-to-regenerate-england-s-cities-with-new-homes>

Government response: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system>

Consultation is currently open, closing on 28th Jan. 2021.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/supporting-housing-delivery-and-public-service-infrastructure>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/supporting-housing-delivery-and-public-service-infrastructure>

Better Care Fund document - this sets out national conditions and confirms how local authorities and CCGs should proceed with finalising plans and pooling agreements for funding under the Better Care Fund (BCF) in 2020 to 2021. These plans are jointly developed by health and social care partners across the country and support integrated, person centred care in communities.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/better-care-fund-policy-statement-2020-to-2021>

PATROL JOINT COMMITTEE

I have been nominated to sit on the PATROL Joint Committee, whose main function is to provide resources to support the independent adjudicators and their staff of the Traffic Penalty Tribunal (TPT). The TPT's local appeal streams include: parking, bus lanes, and littering from vehicles. More information can be found at:

<https://www.patrol-uk.info/patrol-joint-committee/>

POLICE

The first 'marking' event for tools and bikes was held in Ilminster this month, providing an opportunity for tradesmen or members of the public to mark tools and equipment to assist the police with finding stolen items. Marked items are listed onto a database along with details of the owners. A further bike marking event is to be held to allow owners to register the make, model, and serial number on a database.

Domestic abuse – Our local Chief Inspector, Sharon Baker, has been at the centre of a campaign recently launched. The message is really powerful and worth paying attention to.

<https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/news/2020/12/police-officers-share-personal-experiences-of-domestic-abuse-telling-victims-you-are-not-alone/>

SSDC AUDIT

At this month's meeting discussion was had in relation to the need for transparency in the way in which SSDC handles risk when making commercial investments, including the significant risk imposed by the impact of Covid-19. Information was provided on how this is mitigated, and what form the decision-making process takes.

An update to the current regeneration programme was given, and documentation from the published paperwork outlines planned improvements.

A new digital strategy is being put in place to help with tackling the increase in cyber-crime

Overall, it has been a challenging year, a situation reflected across all local authorities, resulting in a significant increase in workload. The focus remains on providing value for money and implementing best practice recommendations.

An explanation was sought, and given, in relation to the discrepancy over the number of new properties built in relation to projected council tax receipts.

SCC – ONE SOMERSET PROPOSAL

An update on the One Somerset proposal was received at this month's Scrutiny Committee.

Overall, one third of town and parish councils had responded to the invitation to attend virtual meetings giving the opportunity to ask questions and find out more information. SCC are working with both Yorkshire and Cumbria and MHCLG with a view to forming an implementation plan, should the bid be successful.

SSDC LICENSING

It has been agreed that officers can now process and grant applications for non-wheelchair accessible vehicles without the need for referral to committee unless the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles falls back to 30%.

HIGHWAYS

SCC's fleet of 23 Gritters will be maintaining the extended winter gritting service

CANAL WAY HEDGES

The maintenance of the hedge along Canal Way continues to be an increasing problem for local residents where it has been difficult to establish responsibility for clearance of undergrowth that is impeding pedestrians.

PLANNING MATTERS

Several parishes have raised planning concerns relating to a number of recent applications, where they are aiming to seek appropriate assurance that mitigation measures are put in place for environmental and highways access issues prior to any permission being granted.

SOMERSET WASTE PARTNERSHIP

Briefing sessions/workshops for the roll out of the Recycle More programme, due to be launched in South Somerset in June 2021, are to be held. The sessions will be by Zoom and will take the format of a short presentation followed by Questions and Answers.

Several dates have been proposed for briefing sessions for SSDC Councillors, in addition to dates on which representatives from PC/TCs are invited to attend. These are:

Weds 14 April: 6.30-7.30pm

Thurs 15 April: 6.30-7.30pm

Mon 19 April: 6.30-7.30pm

CREWKERNE/ILMINSTER SCHOOLS

Concern has been raised by teaching staff and parents in relation to the proposed changes to the current three-tier system for schools in the Ilminster/Crewkerne area.

I have been in receipt of a good deal of communication from interested parties, where it is felt that there has been a lack of communication from SCC officers, a lapse in keeping elected members informed of responses to the recent consultation, and a lack of sufficient notice for attendance at meetings.

The current consultation round finished on Fri. 11th Dec., during which 379 responses were received. The results will now be analysed, and a report produced for a meeting I am due to attend early in the new year. A non-key decision will be made by Cllr. Faye Purbrick prior to the publication of statutory notices in early Jan. of a further 4-week consultation period, the results of which will be put before SCC's Cabinet meeting on 22nd Feb.

It is considered that at present there is an excess of primary school places in the Crewkerne area, and Misterton School is seeking legal advice in relation to the proposals.

Of considerable concern is the increasing deficit of Wadham School (totalling in excess of £1m., and rising). It is expected that once a definitive decision is taken (by 2022?) then the school's financial position will stabilise. The intention is for a recovery budget plan to be put in place to address the deficit, although it is accepted that this will take a number of years.

It is agreed that the deficit is not due to mismanagement but has been made worse by the 3-tier system. However, it is not thought that the deficit will be a barrier to Wadham joining a Multi Academy Trust should this be desired.

Central government funding remains a key barrier to improvement of all Somerset schools where, despite ongoing lobbying by the F40 group of the lowest funded LAs in the country, it is felt that London boroughs and inner-city schools continue to benefit the most.

ELECTION

With Covid-19 restrictions likely to continue for some time, and some local elections due to take place next spring, voters are encouraged to register for postal votes, which can be done by accessing this link. www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-postal-vote

ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

1/12	SSDC Scrutiny
1/12	Broadway PC
1/12	Nyumbani fund raising event
2/12	SSDC Lead Legal Specialist recruitment shortlisting
2/12	Horton quiz
2/12	Winsham PC
3/12	SSDC DX
3/12	SSDC Full Council
4/12	DSFRA Members Forum
4/12	Healthwatch meeting
4/12	DSFRA - Role and Remit of the Shareholder
4/12	Fiveways School business meeting
5/12	Samaritans recruitment interview
6/12	Isle Valley service
7/12	Fiveways School safeguarding policy
8/12	SSDC Licensing committee
9/12	SSDC Area East committee
9/12	SCC Place Scrutiny committee
9/12	Meeting with SCC officer re: Crewkerne/Ilminster Schools
9/12	Horton quiz
10/12	Broadway Christmas Quiz
11/12	SSDC Recruitment interviews
11/12	Samaritans Christmas Quiz
12/12	Whitelackington Art Exhibition
12/12	Donyatt Christmas Quiz
13/12	Isle Benefice Service
14/12	Neroche school governor meeting
16/12	DSFRA
16/12	Horton quiz
19/12	Samaritans recruitment interview
20/12	Isle Valley Benefice service
21/12	Horton prayers
22/12	SSDC Audit Committee
23/12	Horton quiz
25/12	Horton Christmas service
30/12	Horton quiz