

ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR MARCH REPORT 2018

During March weather disruption caused a number of meetings to be cancelled or postponed.

SCC – CHANGES TO KEY PERSONNEL

The Leader has approved the following changes to responsibilities: -

- Cllr David Hall has stood down as Deputy Leader, but retains Cabinet responsibility for Resources & Economic Development
- Cllr Christine Lawrence is now Interim Deputy Leader of Council pending a review in May
- Cllrs Clare Aparicio Paul and Fay Purbrick have swapped junior Cabinet member roles - Clare has moved to Corporate and Community Services, and Faye has moved to Resources and Economic Development.
- Cllr Mandy Chilcott is now Vice-Chair of Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee, and Chair of the Learning Disability Service Task & Finish Group

BUDGETS

The following is a precis of SCC's Leader response to a recent article that appeared in The Times: 'Since becoming aware of the National Audit Office report, and the subsequent interest by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, I have spent considerable time re-assuring myself that there is no substance to the assertion that Somerset is going bankrupt.

Somerset is not the next Northamptonshire. Nor is it going bankrupt. Somerset is under financial strain after 9 years of grant withdrawal and cost saving measures. Over the past few years SCC has lost around 40% of its revenue grants and with 70% of our costs now focused on vulnerable people we have few options. Rest assured that the finances are being managed appropriately.'

COUNTY FARMS

Notwithstanding considerable intervention from interested parties, the decision has been taken to take possession of Oxenford Farm with a view to it being sold as part of SCC's policy to dispose of county farmland.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

An independent review of the costs and fees paid to Adult Care providers for older people is currently underway. A decision paper will be completed once the results of this exercise have been analysed and rates proposed for 2018/19. All providers have been offered the opportunity to take part in the process. The review is ongoing. At this stage SCC are not proposing to update the fees for Residential, Nursing, Home Care or Direct Payments. These changes are affected by national factors such as pension credit and inflation and will have the effect of obtaining additional income for the local authority.

ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES

I met with Stephen Chandler the head of service at the beginning of the month, principally to discuss several specific issues relating to Ilminster residents. Disappointingly, despite assurance that he would investigate and respond to my enquiries within a matter of days, and further prompting from me, I have received no further communication from him. I have now asked the governance officer to intervene.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION BOUNDARY REPORT

The consultation period has now ended, and the outcome is awaited.

ILMINSTER/CREWKERNE SCHOOLS REVIEW

The planned meeting this month between SCC officers and schools has again been postponed.

SCHOOL BUDGETS

SCHOOL BUDGET SHARE FOR 2018/9 (PRIOR TO DEDUCTIONS)	Numbers on role	Post MFG budget 2018/19	Change compared to 2017/18	Funding per pupil 2018/19	% change in funding
Ashill Community Primary School	33	£198,889	£2,773.84	£6,026.95	+ 1.41%
Greenfylde Church of England First School	346	£1,244,991	-£24,037.66	£3,598.24	-1.89%
Neroche Primary School	202	£739,772	£26,651.63	£3,662.24	+3.74%
Swanmead Community School	286	£1,240,903	£40,592.96	£4,338.82	+3.38%
Wadham School	450	£2,342,788	£39,246.66	£5,206.20	+1.70%
Winsham Primary School	39	£277,726	£42,323.66	£7,121.19	+17.98%

BROADBAND UPDATE

Current combined Connecting Devon & Somerset and commercial superfast across Somerset is 86%, set to reach 96% by 2020, representing significant progress; Broadband provision in Somerset was among the lowest in the country when the programme began in 2013. Somerset will continue to require publicly-funded network construction to some of the hardest to reach rural areas. CDS-funded construction will provide a further 68,100 rural homes and businesses with superfast access by 2020. Take up of CDS-provided internet access is now 43% (137,600 homes/businesses), exceeding the national average of 42.6%. CDS will also have an additional £4.8 million in a “gainshare” “dividend” from BT to invest in further expansion of the network in isolated rural communities, with potential to increase this further. CDS has launched a consultation to help target these communities. On completion, CDS will consider other factors, including social deprivation, to allocate “gainshare” funds. Completion is intended by 2020. For more info. go to: <https://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/response-to-cds-gainshare-public-consultation/> CDS has also launched a new broadband voucher scheme to help those not in line for commercial or publicly-funded broadband infrastructure, in addition to a Rural Broadband Infrastructure Fund as part of DEFRA’s Rural Development Programme. Details will be published later.

LIBRARY SERVICE

A public meeting, which was well attended by members of the public, was held in Ilminster this month. This is the first review of the library service in 40 years. Concern has been expressed over the impact of any proposed changes to the most vulnerable residents, particularly in relation to the possible deployment of a mobile library; a solution which is deemed undesirable. Further input and discussions are intended to explore some form of SCC supported community involvement. The consultation period has been extended to 13th June.

Early response from SCC – a sketch plan showing how a small office for 4 desks could be accommodated within the library space. SCC are keen to explore this option further and would be prepared to invest some officer time and commission some design work to see what a ‘community hub’ option might look like. It is felt that there is potential with the introduction of self-service technology, and some investment in design and furniture. There could be some capital funding available to support this option if it could secure a sustainable future for the library.

A decision on the former SS&L centre is likely to be some time ahead.

The Community Library Partnership document sets out a range of options. Whilst volunteering may be a significant part of any community solution, the size of the community and level of usage of the library is quite significant and, if affordable, some form of ongoing staffed input may provide a more viable and effective solution. The ‘no change’ option for Ilminster is still a possibility.

Officers have offered to arrange further meetings with Ilminster Town Council representatives.

To give your views visit www.somerset.gov.uk/librariesconsultation, click on 'Have your Say'.

SHELTERED HOUSING CONSULTATION

SCC currently commissions a Housing Related Support Service in Sheltered Housing. Support is provided to people with needs which might otherwise make it problematic for them to remain in their sheltered flat or bungalow. SCC funded services were commissioned to support prevention of the need for formal adult social care interventions. The service helps tenants to manage correspondence, pay bills/manage the household budget; arrange appointments and plan shopping or meals. The service is specifically focused help with a short-term focus. Some people don't need regular support but may benefit from a periodic visits. A number of things sit outside SCC funding e.g. alarm systems or emergency response service and tenancy support, either paid for through rents or directly by the tenant.

The current contracts sheltered housing support schemes expire in Oct. 2018.

SCC have now completed their initial consultation involvement with housing providers, service users and key stakeholders.

Three key themes were raised -

- Tenants are willing to consider alternative models of delivery for support service, assuming a service would still be available.
- Tenants voiced concerns around losing “wardens” as these are deemed vital and imperative for a sustained quality of life.
- The majority are happy to pay an additional charge to housing providers to ensure current service levels continue, alongside possible alternative models of delivery.

SCC are now proposing to stop the contribution of funding to sheltered housing providers and reinvest into other more equitable services where the funding will support everyone and not just those in Sheltered Housing. One of these is the Community Connect model, a partnership between local community organisations, SCC's Adult Social Care service and health services. It provides support and advice to help people live as independently as possible, for as long as possible, in their own community. Those with high levels of need currently receiving support within their Sheltered Housing environment will still get the help required, but it will now come from the Community Connect service.

Although this is the SCC preferred option they still want to ensure the views of existing service users and the general public are taken into account. A consultation phase will take place from 2nd Apr. - 25th May across Somerset at Sheltered Housing schemes and local Libraries.

To discuss this further contact ShelteredhousingService@Somerset.gov.uk or ring Vicky Chipchase on: 07976698232.

HIGHWAYS

PLANNED ROADWORKS

Chaffcombe	Main Street	Drainage improvement works. Temporary road closure.	24 Sep	28 Sep	5 days
Cudworth	Cudworth Street & Knights Lane	Carriageway resurfacing. Temporary road closure.	01 Oct	12 Oct	10 days

STRUCTURAL MAINTENANCE SCHEMES 2018/19

Non-Principal Carriageway Resurfacing – Stocklinch Road

Drainage Schemes – Cudworth Street, Cudworth

Carriageway Surface Dressing (Principal Network) - B3168 Iminster to Curry Rivel Road

Carriageway Surface Dressing (Non-Principal Network) - Stocklinch Rd & Atherstone Lane; Summer Lane, Chaffcombe; Oxendale Lane & Main Street, Dowlish Wake; Cross Keys, Ashill

WHITELACKINGTON ROAD - STOCKLINCH

There has been considerable resident concern over the pot holes along this stretch of road, the length of time this has gone unresolved, and the poor quality of repair works carried out so far. Highways have confirmed that the full resurfacing to Whitelackington Road is programmed to commence in August 2018. However, the Highways Superintendent will continue to inspect this section of the network and should safety defects be present that require our immediate intervention, these will be marked up on site and the necessary repairs ordered.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES CHARGING POINTS

In response to enquiries, I can confirm that there are plans for a charging point to be installed at West Street Car Park, Iminster.

HEALTH VISITING SERVICES

Proposed changes to the service, due to take effect from April 2019, has prompted a number of comments. Winsham PC have submitted the following, which expresses the view of many: Giving every child the best start in life is acknowledged as one of the priorities for tackling health inequalities. It appears that the number of Health Visitor posts may be reduced and more 'Assistant Practitioners' will be employed. We seek assurance that they will have the skills and experience required.

This is likely to have an impact on many parish households with young children as:

- The number of Health Visitors will be reduced
- £500k worth of cuts are planned after the initial cuts have been implemented
- Fewer Public Health Nurses will place an additional strain on GPs, hospitals and out of hours services
- Health Visitors/School Nursing teams will have less ability to provide crucial skilled support for emotional/mental health issues
- Health Visitors will no longer be employed by the NHS despite being Public Health Nurses
- Health Visitors and School Nurses play a vital role in safeguarding children - missed opportunities to protect children are likely
- We calculate that the current cuts equate to a loss of £90 per baby per year in Somerset

SCHOOL TRAVEL POLICY

SCC reviews its School Travel Policy every 2 years, and in view of financial pressures, are proposing to remove the discretionary elements from the policy. A consultation took place from 16th Oct. 2017 – 15th Dec. 2017 and 207 responses were received. Changes will only affect pupils starting school for the first time and those children who are changing schools, e.g. moving from primary to secondary school. Proposed changes were discussed at Scrutiny Panel. Potential savings linked to the changes will be gradual, once the protection arrangements recede.

Children whose additional needs prevent them from accessing school transport will have bespoke arrangements made. A max. guideline of 15 mins. waiting time on school premises will only apply to primary/middle school pupils from Sept. 2018. Pupils of secondary age may have to wait longer than 15 mins. for their school bus, to allow more flexibility in effectively managing the network fleet. DfE best practice suggests that journeys take no longer than 75 minutes for pupils of secondary school age, including travel to the stop/waiting for the bus.

From Sept. 2018 SCC will remove transport entitlement where a child's parents live apart. Assistance will only be assessed/awarded from the address registered with the school as the home address. Travel assistance will be removed for those attending faith schools unless that school is the child's nearest or catchment school, and over minimum statutory walking distance. The content relating to the suspension and removal of travel assistance due to behavioural reasons will be amended to provide clear thresholds for imposing sanctions. Content relating to Low Income will reflect new guidance; the LA will accept Universal Credit as a form of low income.

PARISH COUNCILLOR TRAINING

Councillor training is planned for Thurs. 19th April 2018 at Winsham Jubilee Hall, to book a place contact Teresa Pinder on winshampc@hotmail.co.uk

COMMUNITY EVENT

The What Matters/Who Cares event held this month was well attended. I have yet to receive further information as to the next steps.

CHARD MUSEUM

This month's AGM attracted 40 members. The new displays featuring key local figures, including Margaret Bondfield, the first female Cabinet Minister, have been very well received. Visitor figures were up, and the museum continues to thrive. There is a current vacancy for a volunteer curator.

SHOUT OUT – an initiative suggested by one of the schools which took part in the recent Somerset school parliament debate to highlight good news, now part of my monthly report. ☺

WINSHAM - THE GEORGE – a grant of £13,980 has been awarded by the Post Office service to help facilitate the move of to the new location of The George (subject to change of use being granted). This is more than originally expected or budgeted for in the business case. The award puts the project in a good position to apply for further grants, once change of use is granted. The community share issue target of £350,000 remains open for contributions from investors.

ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

1/3	SCC – Adult Social Services meeting
11/3	Donyatt VH b'fast
12/3	Childhood Trauma Training
12/3	Dowlish Wake PC meeting
12/3	Donyatt PC meeting
15/3	Fiveways school staffing sub committee
15/3	Iminster Education Foundation
15/3	SSDC transformation update
15/3	SSDC full council
16/3	Somerset Children's Parliament
16/3	Somerset Young Carers fund raising event
16/3	Donyatt VH quiz
17/3	Chard Museum Open Day
17/3	Winsham PC surgery
17/3	Warehouse Theatre performance
20/3	Chard Museum/Fairtrade leaflet exchange – Westlands
22/3	The Minster – meeting re: Maunday Thursday
22/3	IMEx planning meeting
22/3	Iminster Library public meeting

24/3	Whitelackington VH table top sale
24/3	Horton Lent Lunch
24/3	Broadway Church quiz
28/3	Chard Museum AGM
29/3	Resident support – Yeovil magistrate’s court
29/3	The Minster - Maundy Thursday – Last Supper