

ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT MARCH 2017

LEARNING DISABILITIES SERVICES

SCC agreed to continue with the transfer of its in-house learning disabilities service to a new social enterprise, after the Cabinet rejected a request from Scrutiny to delay the transfer and review the decision. The move to a social enterprise, which has been controversial, is intended to improve services, aiming for long term sustainability. SCC believes this will give service users more choice and encourage innovation. Cabinet also agreed that if an additional contribution to funds already set aside to compensate staff for any changes to terms and conditions is required, they would support this. Around 1,200 staff will transfer to the new social enterprise on 1 April. The new enterprise being is created in partnership with nationwide care provider Dimensions UK, who will be consulting over existing terms and conditions.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE FEES AND CHARGES

In 2016/17 SCC significantly increased fees payable to its providers, and in Jan. began the process of taking into account the extent of the impact of those uplifts. In future years SCC have agreed that the Registered Care Providers Association (RCPA) will facilitate ongoing discussion over fee levels and collaborative working, to promote a sustainable and strong provider market. Views have been considered alongside the care requirements, SCC's priorities and the need to maintain support for vulnerable and elderly residents. Key issues raised include impact of changes to employment costs - National Living Wage, Apprenticeships, Pensions; Changes to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and related costs; The widening gap between residential care and nursing care fee rates; The need for improved training and support of health and care organisations; Workforce challenges, including staff retention; A wish to explore collaborative working where Adult Social Care faces financial challenges locally and nationally. In Somerset pressures exceed current budget availability.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

SCC's services for vulnerable children and young people have shown tangible improvements, according to the latest Ofsted monitoring visit, in part due to a pro-active approach towards partnership arrangements and joint working. In addition to noting areas where improvements have taken place, there was acknowledgement of the need for greater consistency and embedding changes at a faster pace in some areas. Caseloads have been reduced, and the ratio of permanent to locum staff is improving, exceeding targets. SCC has taken the lead in the partnership of SW local authorities delivering a 'Step Up to Social Work' programme, encouraging graduates to choose a career in social work. The partnership has been successful in a bid for funding for training that will bring a further 49 children's social workers into the region. In 2016, 96% of newly qualified social workers chose to stay in the county after finishing their first year.

GREENFYLDE SCHOOL – FUTURE EDUCATION PROVISION

Further to the public meeting held earlier this month, I met with Liz Smith for an update on feedback so far. It would appear that, within Ilminster, opinion is currently divided almost 50/50 in for or against proposals for expansion of the school and a move to the Canal Way site. No further action will now take place until after the outcome of the Shudrick Lane appeal decision is announced as this will have an impact on the future needs of the town. If however, the proposal is to go ahead commissioning will need to begin by Sept. if any new school is to be ready for a Sept 2019 start date.

Somerset Local Authorities' Civil Contingencies Unit have launched a new website www.SomersetPrepared.org.uk, where users can find a number of resources and advice to help develop local emergency arrangements.

BROADBAND UPDATE - ILMINSTER

At the request of Ilminster Town Council I have obtained the following information. According to the map on the www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk site the centre of Ilminster is still due to be connected during Phase 1 by 2019. 'records show that the town is either currently, or planned to be, covered through private sector investment by the end of 2019. As such, we are not able to invest public money in this area under European Commission State Aid rules. The information provided is based on the private sector responses to the Sept. 2015 Open Market Review (OMR) which sought to gain information on planned private sector Next Generation Access (NGA) provision up until 2019.'

SALE OF COUNTY FARMS

A recent announcement relating to the further disposal of additional farms within the division (Oxenford Farm and Stibbear Farm, Donyatt) has given cause for concern. In response Cllr. John Osman, Leader of SCC, has said that he had no wish to increase the current level of debt, which all taxpayers have to pay, but that to finance new schools, new roads and new facilities, SCC are looking to see if there is any interest in assets that are not vital to its running. In June 2010 SCC made the policy decision to cease support for farming opportunities in the County and directed for the disposal of the farm estate. Subsequently, a list of the farms suitable for disposal at the earliest, prudent, opportunity were identified and authorisation given for those disposals to commence immediately.

After attending this month's SCC Scrutiny committee meeting I understand that in the new quadrennium consideration will be given to the request for a full review of the current policy.

BENEFIT PENALITIES

At SSDC's full council meeting Council Tax and Housing Benefit Civil penalties were agreed, for benefit recipients failing to notify changes in their circumstances.

SSDC - Electoral review briefing

The district currently has high levels of electoral inequality, where the number of councillors in relation to registered electors are uneven. A review is currently underway, where Ward patterns and community identity will be taken into account. A decision is due at the end of July, after which public consultation will begin, with final recommendations due June 2018.

HIGHWAYS

Gully emptying is due to take place in Cudworth

Road closure – Winsham - Temporary closure of Cow Down Road from Wessex Water, 29th March 2017 for 3 days to enable a new connection standard to be carried out.

Ashill – A358 bypass - Drainage improvement and clearance works. Temporary traffic signals. (19:00pm – 07:00am). Date tbc.

DONYATT SIS update – The feasibility report from the Design Team is imminent.

HORTON – traffic calming measures at the Five Dials junction has largely been welcomed.

SID readings

Ashill - Feb. (Old A358) - Ave. speed - 35 mph 85% Percentile - 41 mph
42 vehicles 50+mph. Total vehicles – 2495.

Broadway - Jan. – Ave. speed - 37 mph 85% Percentile - 44 mph
403 vehicles 50+mph Total vehicles - 7810

Donyatt - 28th Feb – 15th Mar. - Ave. speed - 33 mph 85% Percentile – 37 mph
27 vehicles 50+mph. Total vehicles – 31562

A358

Highways England have launched the consultation on upgrading the A358 from Ilminster to Taunton <https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a358-taunton-to-southfields/>

The current proposal is to come off the existing A358 at the West Hatch turning, joining the motorway at Shoreditch. <https://mm-evt.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=243b05ae94e7496abed225c623d49b91>

RIGHTS OF WAY

I have received several enquiries recently in relation to ownership/maintenance of public rights of way and bridle paths. The situation very much depends on location and I am awaiting a response from the SCC Rights of Way Officer. In the meantime, information can be obtained from <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/plans/rights-of-way/>

GREEN LANE ILMINSTER

UPGRADING FOOTPATH CH32/20 TO A RESTRICTED BYWAY AT GREEN LANE, ILMINSTER – the above application seeks to modify the Definitive Map and Statement to show Green Lane, Ilminster (footpath CH32/20) as a restricted byway. The application has been fully investigated and the resulting report, including a provisional recommendation, has been circulated to interested parties.

SCC's Constitution states that if, having consulted with the appropriate bodies the decision is either contentious or controversial then it must be referred to the Regulation Committee. Advice is being sought from the Chairman of the Regulation Committee on how to proceed.

TRADING STANDARDS – SCAMS AND FRAUD – talk 10th April 7-8pm The Shrubbery

Having recently attended a workshop, and in view of increasing concern over the vulnerability of many local residents to scams and fraud, I have arranged for Ros Cummings from Trading Standards to come and give talk on the above date. Anyone interested in how to protect themselves from such pernicious behaviour may attend.

PLANNING

The result of the Shudrick Lane appeal is due at the end of April, with The Persimmon, Canal Way application due to come before Area West at their meeting on 17th May.

Riverside, Horton and Donyatt Hill – Yarlington have now submitted their applications for re-development of these sites, amid strong objections from local residents, which I wholeheartedly support. Concerns have principally been in relation to the loss of affordable housing in the area, future parking provision, and also regarding options put forward that appear at odds with the original intention expressed by Yarlington.

THE GREAT GET TOGETHER

The Great Get Together is taking place over 17/18 June, in memory Jo Cox. Groups have joined forces to invite friends and neighbours to come together for street parties, picnics, barbecues and bake-off competitions. It is intended that local authorities help to facilitate and actively work towards bringing different communities together. Suggestions include an organised event in a market place, leisure centre or other community building. Local authorities are asked to avoid unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy to enable events to go ahead. No group should be put off because of fears over the cost of insurance or licences. Government guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/your-guide-to-organising-a-street-party>

MAKING IT LOCAL GRANTS

These are still available for the following sectors. For info. go to www.makingitlocal.org

Support for Micro and Small Businesses (non-agricultural) and Farm Diversification

Grants for developing or starting rural micro and small businesses, including social enterprises, and farm diversification projects

Provision of Rural Services - Projects that aim to alleviate some of the difficulties faced by rural communities, particularly lack of access to services and the provision of infrastructure. Projects should make a contribution to growing the local economy and include the development of community buildings, public spaces, or cultural tourism amenities.

Support for Cultural and Heritage Activity – Focusing on the promotion, enhancement and maintenance of cultural heritage assets and events, where this promotes growth in the tourism economy and creates a sense of local identity through raised awareness of their importance. Help to protect cultural heritage features against damage or degradation.

Support for Increasing Forestry Productivity -To deliver permanent new supply chain and jobs that also restore regular management to local woods, encouraging a greater degree of added value to the timber output.

EVENTS/ACTIVITIES ATTENDED

15/3	SSDC Area West – Chard
16/3	SCC – meeting re: Greenfylde School
16/3	Ilminster Education Foundation
16/3	SSDC – full council
18/3	Lent lunch – St. Peter’s Church, Horton
19/3	Combined service - St. Peter’s Church, Horton
19/3	Broadway – resident meetings re; planning and neighbourhood issues
20/3	Horton PC
21/3	SCC – Policies & Place Scrutiny Committee
21/3	Ilminster Town Council
24/3	Ashill – local planning query
24/3	Chard Museum open day
24/3	Dowlish Wake quiz
25/3	Ashill Pre-School fund raiser
25/3	Winsham School Breakfast Club quiz
27/3	Chard Museum Mother’s fund raising event
26/3	Ilminster Bowling Club Charity quiz
30/3	Ilminster Experience meeting
30/3	Fairtrade Committee meeting

