

ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT FEBRUARY 2021

There has been a lot going on this month across the county but, as usual, for the sake of brevity I have included only those items relevant to the division. Apologies for such a lengthy report, and also for any omissions, and the usual typos.

COVID PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

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

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

It is still vitally important for people to stay at home during lockdown and adhere to the restrictions on meeting with others, even if you have received your vaccinations

COVID ENGAGEMENT BOARD

At this month's meeting of the board, it was reported that figures of those contracting Covid-19 are declining, as are the number of deaths.

Last week the PM announced his 'road map' for coming out of lockdown, and confirmation that children will be returning to school from 8th March.

A number of new variants of the virus have developed, which are more infectious. Surge testing is being carried out in the SW to investigate the variants. The professional view is that in the long term this is a virus we will have to live with e.g. like 'flu.

The infection rates in Somerset are coming down, but not as quickly as they did during the first wave. They remain below the SW infection rate, and well below the national rate.

Cases stand at 80 per 100,000 at present in Somerset, and halving every two weeks.

A lag in the data relating to vaccinations, and number of deaths, is due to late registrations.

Concern has been raised that as Somerset is a tourist destination that once lockdown eases up there will be a surge in visitors, and along with it, a risk to local residents.

The situation with churches remains that they may open under certain circumstances, but at present most are choosing to remain closed.

A number of dedicated vaccination sites have now been set up by Primary Care Networks.

There is a good flow of delivery in Somerset (£1m+ doses delivered), but at times vaccine supplies have been limited.

Mass centres have been set up at the Bath & West Showground, in Yeovil and also at Taunton racecourse. It is not known at present how long these centres will need to be in operation for. Vaccination bookings are now being taken up until April/May and centres will remain open until 12 weeks after that. The second doses of vaccine, beginning in mid-March, will be given at the place where people received their first dose.

The four first cohorts have now all been vaccinated, with a renewed focus on cohorts 5&6.

On vaccination, an advisory leaflet should be given outlining restrictions and precautions.

The majority of care home residents have now been vaccinated, and all funeral directors.

TOURISM BUSINESS SUPPORT

SCC is working in partnership with local tourist organisations to provide free business support. The Visitor Economy Support Programme (VESP), funded by £500k from the Somerset Business Rates Retention Pilot programme (BRRP), is intended to deliver economic growth and prosperity. The scheme will fund free support services to visitor businesses (up to 249 employees), focusing on the impact of Covid, business resilience and growth. Support includes marketing communications and digital advice, as well as compiling sector specific research to assist with forward planning and growth.

Accommodation, retail, high street, food & drink, creative industries, heritage, visitor attractions, activity providers and outside visitor spaces can apply to receive support.

To register go to : - www.visit-exmoor.co.uk/trade/vesp-somerset-business-support

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

At this month's full council meeting a grant of up to £400k, funded from Covid funding, was awarded to Somerset Citizens Advice Bureau to support the additional work they have been carrying out.

Consideration is being to producing a 'Somerset Medal' in recognition of those who have gone the extra mile during the pandemic.

£100k+ has been used to supplement free school meals, which will continue during Easter and the summer holidays.

This year's budget has focused heavily on adults and children's services and family support, where it is acknowledged that in recent years funding levels have fallen short, having an impact on services. To fund the additional resources required an additional 3% was precepted, which will be ring-fenced.

A council tax increase of 1.99% was also improved, broadly in line with increases of the majority of other authorities.

£130m. has been allocated for new project schemes, including £6m. for climate change. SCC's financial position, despite continuing to repay loans inherited by the current administration, is in a healthy state, with £90m. in reserves.

SSDC BUDGET AND PRECEPT

At this month's full council meeting a tax increase of 2.91% was agreed, increasing the annual Band D rate by £5 to £177.11, which includes £1.85 of behalf of the Somerset Rivers Authority.

SSDC ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

Where do we want to be?

SSDC Environment Strategy states as priority outcome

By 2030 we commit to achieving a significant reduction, in the order of 80%, in our carbon emissions. Our ambition is to be carbon neutral across our own operations and land holdings by 2030 at the latest, and ideally by 2023, so any residual carbon emissions will need to be offset.



We will Reduce our Reliance on Fossil Fuels; by

- reducing our energy consumption
- harnessing natural resources, for example by harvesting rain and grey water
- switching to renewable sources of energy
- raising expectations of developers, through our Local Plan policies
- making sustainable procurement choices
- investigating in additional green energy investments

SSDC ENERGY PROCUREMENT

A Facilities Management specialist is being to recruited, to start in July. There is acknowledgement that there are cost implications for Green Energy and at present the position is unclear. SSDC has been awarded a de-carbonisation grant.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Government support, totalling £50m. is to be provided for small businesses, landlords and leaseholders.

[Support for small businesses, landlords and leaseholders: government charges up the electric vehicle revolution with £50 million boost - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/support-for-small-businesses-landlords-and-leaseholders-government-charges-up-the-electric-vehicle-revolution-with-50-million-boost)

SSDC INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Several local residents have shown an interest in SSDC's commercial investment strategy. The table below shows key items. The sums given are in multiples of £1k.

Investment in Property - OPIUM Taunton	130	
Investment in Property - Fareham Energy Res Ltd Loan	1,320	
Investment in Property - OPIUM Fareham	9,253	
Investment in Property - Costa Coffee	20	680
Investment in Property - Trafalgar House, Taunton	23	
Investment in Property - 27-29 Sherwood Road, Bromsgrove	218	
Investment in Property - King William House	1	
Yeovil Innovation Centre - 1st Floor Fit-Out	21	
Yeovil Innovation Centre - Car Park Extension	94	
Car Park Enhancements	0	28
New Car Parks	40	200
Electric Vehicle Charge Points	0	
Car Park Improvement Works	0	310

SSDC PLANNING

At this month's District Exec., the item relating to the current situation with regard to the impact of Phosphates was deferred as further work was required, with the result that planning decisions will be delayed for a matter of months rather than weeks.

At Full Council the adoption of the Phosphate Load Calculator was agreed to assist developers by raising awareness of measures that need to be taken.

Although enforcement issues remain of concern to several communities, the number of outstanding cases has been reduced.

During January 2021 there were 47 reports of suspected planning breaches and over 50 visits have been carried out to address reports of caravans without planning permission. Extra support is being provided for the enforcement team and Planning Contravention notices are being issued.

Wessex Water gave officers a presentation about the EnTrade credit system last month, which seeks to put in place a system of environmental credit for developers to access as offsite mitigation/offsetting for the impacts of development. It is expected that Natural England will introduce a formal accreditation scheme. At this month's meeting a decision was taken to put pressure on Wessex Water to be more accountable.

The ecologist post has now been filled, subject to starting date. The successful candidate has experience of working with local water companies, local authorities and developers.

FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOMERSET

Earlier this month the Local Government Secretary announced the start of a consultation to decide our future. All residents and businesses are strongly urged to participate.

Two bids have been submitted as follows:

Stronger Somerset, a joint bid for two unitary authorities, with an East/West, split submitted by the four districts www.strongersomerset.co.uk.

One Somerset bid for a single authority submitted by SCC www.onesomerset.org.uk

To respond to the Government's consultation, go to <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/governance-reform-and-democracy/somerset/>.

You can also respond by email or post.

Anyone requiring additional information about either bid please feel free to contact me.

This month elected members received a briefing from SSDC on the proposals for partnership working and collaboration in relation to Adult's & Children's services and localities. It is accepted that there will be increasing demand for adult services.

SSDC SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM RE-STRUCTURE.

To support the development of a shared approach to economic and community recovery and sharing resources with other Somerset authorities it has been proposed to consider sharing the Director of Place & Recovery role with another authority, and delegate the details of such arrangements, to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and



Responsibility Areas:

Strategy & Support	Service Delivery	Commercial & Income	Place & Recovery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance • People (HR) • Legal & MO • Digital • Communications & Marketing • Performance and Organisational Development • Strategic Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local Plan - Council Plan - Emergency Planning - Community Planning • Democracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Connect • Locality • Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental Health - Licensing • Built Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development Management - Building Control • Communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revs & Bens - Housing & Homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial & Operational Property • Arts & Entertainments • Leisure & Recreation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Countryside - Yeovil Rec - TIC - Heritage • Commercial Income & Opportunity Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - YIC • Environmental Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Streetscene - Horticulture - Waste Partnership - Bereavement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy & Community Recovery Plan • Strategic & Recovery Funding Bids <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shared Prosperity - Levelling Up - Towns Fund - Other recovery funds • Economic Development • Town Centre Regeneration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chard - Wincanton - Yeovil - Market towns • Accelerating Housing Delivery • Supporting Families / Poverty & Social Mobility

the Portfolio Holders for Economy and Community Health & Wellbeing.

POLICE

Avon and Somerset Police have launched a new Crime Prevention Through Sport fund. This aims to support projects that use sport and physical activity to reduce violence, crime and anti-social behaviour. It is for projects that focus on using activity as a tool to engage and support young people up to the age of 25. Applications that use sport in its widest sense including traditional, informal sports and activities are encouraged to apply.

For more info. and to download an application pack visit the following link:

[SASP covering projects in Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset and Somerset West & Taunton](#)

HIGHWAYS - A303

This month the application for the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Dualling was been given development consent by the Secretary of State for Transport. This grants development consent for a continuous dual carriageway on the A303, running from the Podimore Roundabout and the Sparkford Bypass.

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY



Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority (Budget) Meeting 19 February 2021

Agenda item 10a – 2021-22 Revenue Budget and Council Tax Levels

RECOMMENDATION

That, as recommended by the Resources Committee at its budget meeting held on 10 February 2021 (Minute RC/38 refers), the Authority approves:

- a. that the level of council tax in 2021-22 for a Band D property be set at £90.00, as outlined in Option B in this report, representing a 1.99% increase over 2020-21, and that accordingly a Net Revenue Budget Requirement for 2021-22 of £74,222,400 be approved; and
- b. that, as a consequence of the decisions at (a) above:
 - i. the tax base for payment purposes and the precept required from each billing authority for payment of total precept £54,849,642 (Option B), as detailed on Page 2 of the respective budget booklet;
 - ii. the council tax for each property bands A to H associated with the total precept as detailed in the respective budget booklet;
- c. that £0.415m of funding is made available to fund an additional 12 development firefighter posts;
- d. that the Treasurer's 'Statement of the Robustness of the Budget Estimates and the Adequacy of the Authority Reserve Balances', as set out at Appendix B to the report, be endorsed.

At this month's meeting the budget for 2021/22 was agreed.

BROADBAND UPDATE

SSDC are due to hold a Portfolio Holder briefing in March to provide an update on recent developments and initiatives in Superfast Broadband for South Somerset.

The briefing will include:

Wessex Internet and Konnect will make presentations and answer questions

Wessex Internet has the new contract from Connecting Devon and Somerset for increasing coverage in the majority of South Somerset, using government subsidy for areas that are not commercially attractive

Konnect is a new commercial satellite service for remote residents and businesses that can provide good broadband speeds to all addresses. SSDC is negotiating a discount on set-up fees for South Somerset clients. Other commercial suppliers are rolling out networks in South Somerset, where the need is greatest, supported by SSDC.

SSDC is preparing a directory to inform residents and businesses about the available schemes, and how to apply for them.

DOG FOULING

I have received a number of reports relating to dog fouling, which have been reported to SSDC. Dog owners are warned that 'A person in charge of a dog, whether they are the owner or not, must clean up after their dog has fouled in a public place. Failure to do so

may lead to a fine or prosecution in court. We will investigate areas where repeated dog fouling is an issue or where a known individual is allowing their dog to foul in a public area.’
<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/services/environmental-health/dog-related-issues/dog-fouling/>

NEROCHE SCHOOL

The school, now part of the Uffculme Academy Trust, have reported that their Eco Council have continued to work hard during Covid on recycling initiatives and continue to work towards Green Flag status, receiving notification this month that they have awarded Bronze Eco School status.

ILMINSTER EDUCATION FOUNDATION

I continue to be the elected representative for the foundation.

The IEF was set up after the closure of Ilminster Grammar School and the funds are used to support local children. Normally IEF supports children from Ilminster area schools to participate in school trips and the individual purchase of educational equipment and university book costs. Applications have been reduced this year, and this month Neroche School received a donation of £1927 from IEF and are expected to receive a similar amount shortly. This double allocation is the result of an underspend due to COVID.

IEF have also received a request from Ilminster Town Council to negotiate a new lease on land owned by IEF, including that sub-leased to Ilminster Cricket Club.

CREWKERNE/ILMINSTER SCHOOLS

There has been considerable interest shown in the proposals being put forward by SCC, which has generated press interest and a petition. I have responded to all of those who have been in direct contact with me and continue to meet on a regular basis with officers and other elected members. In response to issues raised, I have received the following:

- There is local opposition, but consultation activity over many years has shown that there is no one way forward that secures widespread support.
- The debate has been ongoing for ten years and during this time many attempts were made to find a way forward, including funding schools to develop a model supported by the majority. All of these attempts failed to secure a model that the community as a whole could agree on, and during this time the financial situation in the area's schools has worsened.
- Performance is not equally high in all the schools locally. While Wadham upper school has gone from strength to strength and was the highest performing in the area in the last round of Key Stage 4 national exams (higher than Stanchester, Beaminster or Holyrood, and the only school locally with a positive score), Key Stage 2 results in one middle school have been below average for many years.
- As part of the last consultation, members of the public put forward alternative approaches, which were all were considered in full and none of them were considered to be either feasible or likely to provide better educational outcomes.
- If this proposal goes forward other public concerns that have been raised would be addressed, specifically more investment locally in school buildings which are in disrepair, and a second bus for Ilminster pupils so that they can access after school activities at Wadham.

FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT – 22nd Feb. – 7th Mar.

Fairtrade fortnight is well under way this year with the plea that we all do as much as we can to support this, including submitting any Fairtrade recipes, including videos.

<https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/buying-fairtrade/>

ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

1/2	Isle Valley prayers
1/2	Fiveways School staffing committee
1/2	SSDC Phosphates update
2/2	School Evidence for Learning training
2/2	SSDC Scrutiny
2/2	Broadway PC
3/2	Isle Valley Northumbrian prayers
3/2	Chard Museum Trustee meeting
3/2	Horton quiz
3/2	Winsham PC
4/2	SSDC District Exec.
4/2	Fairtrade meeting
5/2	DSFRA member forum
6/2	Samaritans recruitment interview
7/2	Isle Valley communion service
7/2	Isle Valley service
8/2	LGA Covi-19 response for Licensing premises
8/2	SSDC Licensing sub-committee
8/2	Neroche School governors meeting
8/2	Isle Valley compliance service
9/2	LGA taxi licensing update
9/2	Samaritans recruitment interview
9/2	Horton quiz
10/2	SCC Ilminster/Crewkerne Schools meeting
10/2	Winsham PC planning meeting
11/2	School Governor complaints training
14/2	Isle Valley service
15/2	Isle Valley prayer meeting
15/2	Chaffcombe PC
16/2	SSDC Scrutiny Energy Procurement T&F meeting
16/2	Ilminster Lit. Fest. meeting
17/2	SCC full council
17/2	Horton quiz
18/2	Covid Engagement Board
18/2	SSDC Group Leaders meeting
18/2	SSDC Stronger Somerset Adult's & Children's services briefing
18/2	Samaritans recruitment team meeting
19/2	DSFRA
21/2	Isle Valley Communion
21/2	Isle Valley service
22/2	Museums SW spring meeting
22/2	SEND governor training
23/2	School Governors Careers Forum
23/2	Ilminster TC
24/2	SSDC CEO meeting
24/2	BHMC
24/2	Horton quiz
24/2	Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) training
25/2	SSDC FC
28/2	Isle Valley Communion
28/2	Isle Valley service

Since lockdown, I have completed the Training, Assessment, and Quality Assurance (TAQA) qualification which now enables me to professionally assess those working in local government, with a focus on Modern Apprentices.

I am also now certified as a 'Competent Person' to carry out Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) for Class 1 appliances for 'low risk' premises such as offices, village halls and churches etc., and am willing to offer my services free of charge within the Division.