

ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT REPORT JULY 2020

Whilst Covid-19 continues to linger, much of this month's formal meeting activity has focused on actions taken and plans to prevent further outbreaks.

SCC FULL COUNCIL

At this month's virtual meeting a range of questions were posed by members of the public and other interested parties, largely relating to the impact of Covid-19 and its impact on transport, and the future of local government.

In addition to this, a number of reports relating to the various SCC committees were presented to members for noting.

FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

After much debate, the One Somerset Business Case was approved at SCC full council (33 voting for; 14 against; 4 abstentions).

- the Leader of the Council was authorised to submit the Business Case to the Secretary of State, MHCLG, for a decision on the future of local government in Somerset
- the Leader of the Council was authorised to submit further supporting evidence arising from ongoing engagement, and future consultation; and any requests included in the pending invitation from the Secretary of State, MHCLG, supporting this case.
- It was agreed to support the Leader of the Council continuing to seek consensus with the district and local councils across Somerset, towards the creation of a new single-tier unitary council for Somerset.

This decision has caused some consternation amongst the four Somerset district councils, who are still in the process of developing their alternative for consideration and have issued a public statement outlining their position.

POLICE

Locally there is a new member of the beat team, Steve Trace, who joined in April.

The police approach to dealing with the challenges raised by Covid-19 is - Engage, Explain, Encourage, and then Enforce. Several calls in relation to possible Covid-19 breaches have been received but overall during lockdown the crime rate was reduced. However, the beat team remained busy visiting schools and vulnerable people.

Since lockdown has been gradually lifted speeding has been a particular problem for local residents, and anti-social behaviour is now beginning to return to Ilminster Rec, with regular foot patrols to help tackle this. The police have requested that people call in at the time of ongoing incidents as it is difficult to follow up activities in hindsight.

In relation to the hospitality industry, a considerable amount of work has been carried out so that establishments knew what was required of them in relation to risk assessments etc. With regard to pavement licenses, there is an assumption that all establishments will be eligible for one, but this is dependent upon appropriate space without blocking pavements. So far, restaurants have been the only ones to take advantage of this.

INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP

The new communication strategy 'Employer Brand 2020' has been launched to take into account the changing environment and to challenge perceptions about the role of a police officer, to initiate a cultural shift that will enable the service to recruit more widely and highlight its benefits.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT PLAN

This has now been produced and a clear action plan, primarily based on prevention is being put into place. The first meeting of the board, involving a range of partner organisations, has been set up held. Public health officers meet each morning and are producing a weekly Covid-19 dashboard.

A local testing strategy is being developed. Attached with this report are the public health slides presented at the meeting.

SCC now has the power to close particular premises and public spaces, in addition to preventing certain activities or events from taking place e.g. unlicensed music events.

SOMERSET HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

A presentation was received giving details of the joint Covid-19 response by SCC, CCG and the Police, and details were provided of actions taken relating to the declaration of a major incident. The first phase was containment to protect capacity within the NHS to cope; this was achieved by 'pushing down' the curve of expected Covid-19 cases needing hospital admission. The second phase was the delay phase, involving shielding, lockdown, social distancing and assessing the success against the government's '5 tests'. Once a major incident was announced, this resulted in stepping down elective care, and doubling of intensive care facilities, in addition to increasing digital consultations (up from 5% of activity to 90% in primary care). The key risks at this stage were identified as the provision of PPE and availability of testing.

Covid-19 is not a short-term issue and cleaning and social distancing will reduce the capacity of primary care services by up to 30%.

SCC Adult Social Care has been working closely with the NHS and the Nightingale Unit in Yeovil (Hendford Lodge) has helped to free up capacity.

From the Police perspective, initially crime dropped by 30% but there was an increase in demand to enforce the lockdown regulations. There were 6,000 reported breaches, resulting in 118 Penalty Notices being issued and 15 arrests. Despite concern about an increase in domestic abuse as a result of lockdown, there has not been a significant change in Somerset.

Co-ordinated joint activity by District Authorities has built up community resilience and support for vulnerable people; delivery of food to those being Shielded, setting up food distribution hubs and establishing the Coronavirus Helpline, which has taken 3,485 calls, in addition to 1,293 call outs to identified vulnerable people. Requests for food are growing as more people become vulnerable due to recent changes in their financial status. There has been considerable work to support rough sleepers; in total 140 people were given temporary accommodation.

Support has also been given in relation to transport and economic recovery activities, including business grants, business rates reduction and PPE distribution.

Taking into account the lessons learned from dealing with the pandemic, priorities for the next phase include suppressing the spread of COVID-19; to reduce the prevalence of COVID-19 being transmitted; to ensure health & social care capacity meets needs; to monitor and co-ordinate services to maximise and make best use of available capacity to meet the needs of the population; to mitigate the longer term impact of the pandemic on health, wellbeing and inequalities; to scale up staff testing and monitoring of available workforce; implement measures to ensure physical distancing, town centre, workplace arrangements, schools and nurseries.

The actions taken and the effectiveness of coordinated working by SCC has received national recognition, being nominated for an award, and SCC is in a strong position to tackle the next phase.

Rather than utilise the 'Digital by Default' approach of other local authorities, it is intended that there be the appropriate consideration to ensure that those who struggle with digital solutions are catered for.

The Public Health message remains • Keep Your Distance • Keep Washing Your Hands • Isolate for 7 days if you have symptoms (dry cough, fever or reduced taste sense of smell) • Do not go to work if you have symptoms.

SSDC FULL COUNCIL

The new Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points are now in operation in West Street Car Park. One local resident has raised concern over the suitability of the type selected and concern has also been raised in relation to those who may use the charging points but leave their vehicle beyond the required time, preventing others from using them. SSDC are considering a further 20+ locations for EV charging points, with Ilminster in the mix for receiving a second one in the future.

ILMINSTER/CREWKERNE SCHOOL REVIEW

Following the outcome of the recent judicial review, SCC will be reviewing the Futures for Somerset (FfS) report, responses to the consultation that was undertaken last summer, and other feedback received at that time. It is expected that early in September SCC will be able to offer clear options on the way forward for discussion and further consultation. There is recognition that retaining the current structure of schools is not an option. During the autumn term SCC will carry out an informal discussion/consultation period with head teachers and governing bodies of schools in the area, the Diocese, the Regional Schools Commissioner, The Bath and Wells MAT and the Bridgwater College Trust to help shape the final proposal, which will be presented to the SCC Cabinet meeting on the 21 Oct. There will then follow a formal consultation period, determined by the scale and complexity of the changes proposed and the specific processes that need to be followed. The aim is to have implemented any change to structure by the beginning of the academic year 2022/23 but this will be dependent on several factors.

SCHOOL RE-OPENING

Some OFSTED visits will take place in the autumn term. These will be of an advisory nature in view of the disruption caused by Coronavirus. Concern remains over school transport provision.

SEND

I have received communication from several parents of SEND children who are extremely concerned about the impact of the closure of Shapwick School on the future education of their children. I am actively pursuing this on their behalf.

LICENSING

The government's Business and Planning Bill makes two significant licensing changes to support business as lockdown measures are relaxed:

- the creation of a new (temporary) "pavement licence" to be issued by district councils, authorising the use of the public highway by pubs, cafes, bars and restaurants
- any premises authorised for on-sales of alcohol is deemed to also authorise off-sales.

Pavement licences – this is a new form of license permitting a licence holder to put removable furniture on part of the public highway for one of two purposes:

- to sell or serve food or drink from their premises
- for customers to consume food or drink from the licence holder's premises

The food or drink must be supplied from premises which are or are proposed to be used:

- as a public house, wine bar or other drinking establishment
- otherwise used for the sale of food or drink for consumption on or off the premises

Pavement licences can be used to offer *al fresco* service to customers who, were it not for social distancing requirements, would be consuming food and drink inside the premises.

Local authorities have been required to do a lot of work in preparation for applications in a short period of time, whilst also preparing to exercise enforcement powers.

Risks to public health and safety are highlighted as a ground for revoking a pavement licence. It is suggested that a standard condition requiring tables to be located "1m+" apart is required.

The bill also removes the requirement for planning permission or a street trading licence; anything which is authorised to be done under the terms of a pavement licence is deemed also to be authorised under the planning and street trading regimes. All pavement licences are granted for a minimum of three months and will automatically lapse on 30 Sept. 2021.

SSDC AREA WEST

At this month's meeting an update on the Stop Line Way (SLW) was received. This is the Sustrans Route 33 long distance coast-to-coast walking and cycling route, which in parts is suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs. This section of the SLW runs through South Somerset from Ilminster to Chard across the flood plain of The River Isle alongside remains of the Chard Canal and past Chard Reservoir with views of the Blackdown Hills AONB. This part of the SLW route is well defined, enabling members of the community to access the countryside for leisure and provide a safe, green commuter route for residents to get to schools, work, local shops and services. The intention is to enable the SLW to continue along the old Great Western Railway route and other designated routes where possible towards Devon.

SSDC DISTRICT EXECUTIVE MEETING 2ND JULY 2020

To date 810 emergency boxes have been delivered in response to Covid-19.

In supporting the homeless, 22 rough sleepers were settled into emergency and other accommodation. In addition to this, several other rough sleepers (6-7) chose not to take advantage of this for personal reasons.

The emergency recovery strategy was approved, and a redundancy task force has been set up to aid those affected by Covid-19.

There continues to be some concern in relation to the safety implications of re-opening play areas and leisure facilities.

SSDC PLANNING

As part of the working group looking at the reform of the planning department at SSDC I have been actively involved in the new format being considered to make the service more efficient. Concern has been raised over the possibility that planning decisions may be centralised, removing the important part that the current area structure plays. As far as I am aware this is not the intention, and there is recognition that SSDC's current area system is much valued.

A recommendation has been made to investigate additional land allocations for Ilminster.

There have been significant changes to personnel in the planning department at SSDC this month, including the departure of a number of senior officers, which is causing concern. Of particular note, is the high level of inconsistency in relation to processes, which I am taking up with the officers concerned. In view of the situation it is anticipated that there will be some disruption.

This response was received over concerns raised relating to inconsistencies within the planning department 'Thank you for making contact and expressing your concerns. We can appreciate that changes to the team are not ideal, but in any environment there is turnover of staff. We will work hard to minimise the risk of lack of consistency in dealing with applications.'

Housing targets are still not being met, where there has been an overestimation of supply delivery; it is agreed that housing delivery needs to be accelerated. According to the local plan, 725 houses per annum are required but just 78% of approvals have actually delivered over the last five years, with no identifiable trend evident. Currently the annual completion rate is 52% of approvals.

Affordable housing completions remain below the aim of 35%.

A number of communities are exceeding their housing requirement, where there is a shortfall in Yeovil, Chard and Crewkerne. The lack of development in Yeovil can be explained by limited funding available for infrastructure and funding for community benefit. There are a limited number of companies in the area for house building and relatively high infrastructure costs.

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

A pay increase of 2% has been offered, along with ongoing discussions in relation to changing working practices. 3,697 home safety visits have been carried out so far this year, double the number for 2019. This month, in my role as Vice Chair of the HR Committee I participated in the recruitment of three senior officers.

LIBRARIES

The Somerset Mobile Library Service is expected to be back on the road this month.

The Home Library Service delivered in partnership with the Royal Voluntary Service, has been delivering books to customers who are unable to leave their homes.

Full details of re-opening libraries, including hours of opening and services available, can be found on the Somerset Libraries website - www.somersetlibraries.co.uk and via their social media pages – search for Somerset Libraries UK on Facebook, @SomersetLib on Twitter and Somerset Libraries on Instagram.

Only limited services are available and unfortunately customers will not be able to browse shelves in the library. By providing staff with a few key details about what you are looking for, a hand-picked selection of books, and/or talking books, and/or DVDS will be available for collection at a time convenient for you from the library. No hire charges will apply. Using the request form, you can mention your favourite authors and other preferences.

Limited internet access is available, primarily for residents, who don't have internet access at home, but who need essential services. Computers will need to be pre-booked and can be used for up to an hour. Each computer and workstation will be sanitised between bookings and there will be 2 metre distancing between desks. Due to social distancing measures in place, staff will be able to provide limited support for customers.

CHARD MUSEUM

The museum is due to re-open on Aug. 1st with small groups allowed in one at a time. This will be managed by an online booking service, preferably accessed via the following link <https://www.chardmuseum.co.uk/visit> by emailing the museum at info@chardmuseum.co.uk or calling on 01460 65091.

ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

1/7	SSDC Area South
1/7	Horton quiz
1/7	Winsham PC
2/7	SSDC District Exec.
2/7	LGA conference session
2/7	DSFRA Resources Committee
2/7	Fiveways school governor meeting
3/7	SCC One Somerset workshop
3/7	SCC Coronavirus briefing
5/7	Horton service
6/7	Horton prayer
6/7	SW Assoc. of Leaders for Special Schools curriculum training
6/7	SWALSS school Covid governance
7/7	SSDC planning group workshop
7/7	Broadway PC
8/7	SSDC Area East
8/7	SW Museums fund raising workshop
8/7	Community Crisis recovery workshop
8/7	Horton quiz
8/7	Fairtrade meeting
9/7	SSDC Planning reform workshop
10/7	SCC Coronavirus briefing
12/7	Horton service
13/7	Horton prayer
13/7	Avon & Somerset Police Employer Brand briefing
13/7	Chad Museum trustee training
13/7	SSDC member briefing on One Somerset
13/7	Ashill PC
14/7	SSDC Scrutiny workshop – Future of Local Government
14/7	DSFRA Forum
14/7	SWALSS webinar – wellbeing - leading inclusive schools
15/7	Police Independent Advisory Group
15/7	SCC Scrutiny
15/7	SSDC Area West
15/7	Horton quiz
16/7	SCC Health & Wellbeing Board
16/7	SSDC District Exec.
16/7	DSFRA committee meeting
16/7	SSDC full council
17/7	SCC Coronavirus briefing
20/7	Horton PC
21/7	SSDC Regulation
21/7	DSFRA HR planning
21/7	SALC meeting
22/7	Iminster TC
22/7	Horton quiz
23/7	SSDC planning working group
26/7	Horton service
26/7	Fund raising quiz
27/7	DSFRA HR committee
28/7	Broadway PC
29/7	SCC full council
29/7	SCC Regulation
29/7	Horton quiz
30/7	SSDC planning working group
30/7	Iminster division Zoom meeting
31/7	Somerset Covid-19 Engagement Board