

ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT APRIL 2020

As might be expected this month, life under lockdown has posed some challenges for all of us, but overall our towns and parishes are managing to get to grips with new technology in order to ensure that where at all possible it is 'business as usual'.

Both SCC and SSDC have now re-instated the majority of their scheduled calendar meetings, enabling the public to participate where necessary.

I am all too aware of the problems for those residents who may not have ready access to technology feeling that they are further isolated.

Do remember that it is your elected members who are there so safeguard your interests, so do feel free to contact them about any issue that concerns you. My contact details are at the bottom of this report.

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

It is encouraging that Somerset the number of Covid-19 cases in Somerset remains low.

I have been providing twice weekly updates, so do not propose to go into detail in this report.

SCC has been working closely with the district councils and other interested parties to ensure that help is available when and where needed. For telephone contact there is now one single number to call **0300 790 6275** providing:

- 1) Emotional support
- 2) Transport to a medical appointment
- 3) Help with waste collection subjects
- 4) Financial advice

In supporting the most vulnerable several measures have been put in place, and information can be accessed via a number of methods. Where possible, officers have been making direct telephone contact with those identified as needing support. Attached to this report are details of useful contacts to deal with the various issues that may arise, whether to do with health, business, finance, housing, waste disposal etc.

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/news/2020/3/coronavirus-covid-19-how-we-are-supporting-our-communities-and-the-most-vulnerable/>

FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

This remains on the agenda for both district councils and SCC, who are continuing to explore options.

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

The impact of Covid-19 continues to be manageable. The number of staff 'self isolating' and those with 'Covid symptoms' continues to reduce, and testing is under way, based on eligibility.

Regular updates are being received; firefighters are working closely with police colleagues, and a number of firefighters have undergone ambulance training and are supporting the service.

Two senior officers retired from active duty this month, and the vacancy created has attracted a lot of interest.

SOUTH WEST EMPLOYERS PANEL

Council employees have been offered an improved pay increase of 2.75% from 1 April 2020, plus an additional one day's leave which would increase the minimum entitlement from 21 to 22 days per year (plus public holidays). The National Employers, who negotiate pay on behalf of 350 local authorities, made the offer to unions; It will affect over 1 million employees.

This pay offer does not apply to council chief executives, senior officers, teachers or firefighters, who are covered by separate national pay arrangements.

AVON & SOMERSET POLICE – INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP

Across the Somerset East area 10 new PCSOs have joined the force; including Yeovil, Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster.

Critical outreach work is continuing. Local Authorities have been tasked by central government to accommodate those who are homeless during the crisis and most have now been housed.

Those who have more complex lives and find living in accommodation a challenge due to addiction or mental health issues are congregating in well-known areas.

Everyone has been given a mobile phone even if not accommodated so outreach workers can keep in contact with them, and meals are being delivered.

Street Link is a national website where members of the public can report seeing rough sleepers <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/>

In response to a request for PPE over 50 offers were made to the police force.

Tension as a result of lockdown is low overall; Supermarkets are on daily patrol plans and are being visited regularly.

Members of the IAG have been monitoring tension on social media.

'Silent Solution' <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/how-you-can-now-make-16091412> shows how victims can call 999 and get help even if they are unable to talk freely.

Ramadan started on 24th April, and all mosques remain closed.

Overall crime is down by approx. 38%. Frontline staff have been able to be more visible, in responding to reported breaches of the restrictions, and holding online beat surgeries.

Sickness levels are relatively low, although this is expected to rise as frontline staff become exposed to the virus. Plans are in place to allow for this. The police are dealing with as much they can over the phone. Skype for Business is being used to communicate with other organisations and the public, enabling 1-to-1 video chats and instant messages, which is useful for taking statements and conducting interviews.

The key messages to enable policing by consent are

- **Engage** with people
- **Explain** what the rules are and what we need people to do
- **Encourage** people to follow the rules
- **Enforce** – only where absolutely necessary

Those who deliberately cough at key workers will be charged with assault and anyone using Coronavirus to threaten emergency and essential workers faces serious criminal charges, punishable by up to 12 months in prison

There has been a rise in the number of attacks on phone masts across the country linked to COVID-19 conspiracy theories. Over the Easter weekend alone there were reports that 20 sites across the country were targeted in suspected arson attacks. Patrol plans have been adjusted to include mast sites that could be targeted.

Response to priority calls are being attended 70% of the time within an hour, with a current average of 36 minutes.

SCHOOL CHILD CARE

Initial problems due to a lack of understanding of the provision provided, and eligibility, now seems to have been resolved. There is concern over the low take up of childcare provision for vulnerable children.

SOMERSET WASTE PARTNERSHIP

I have yet to receive any firm date for the re-opening of re-cycling centres. There is an awareness of the need to do so but there is also concern over how this would be policed to ensure everyone's safety. This is likely to be a phased opening, reliant on staffing availability. Some staff have been helping out with kerbside collections. It is also hoped that the green waste collections will soon re-start. Response to enquiries using their Facebook link have been positive.

<https://www.facebook.com/SomersetWaste/>

FLY TIPPING

Incidences of fly tipping have increased significantly. It is felt that this is connected with the closure of waste re-cycling centres. SSDC's Street Scheme team have been praised for their prompt action where fly tipping has been reported.

BONFIRES

Recent weeks have seen a rise in calls to the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service to attend potentially dangerous back garden bonfires, and district councils are also seeing a growing number of complaints about nuisance fires. The public is being urged not to light bonfires and think about the impact on neighbours and emergency services.

Where possible, people should hold on to garden waste until Recycling Centres reopen.

Home composting may be an option for some and you can find more information here <https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/home-composting/>

Burning plastics, rubber or painted materials is illegal and the fumes can cause pollution and is harmful to health. The public are asked not to report bonfires unless they are out of control.

FLOODING

In view of Covid-19 temporary changes have been made to protect the Flood Warning Service and to preserve the ability to provide warnings where necessary. In order to safeguard the service focus is on the most important warnings, where flooding is expected or where there is a risk to life. Low level Flood Alerts will continue, to ensure that people have the early warning advice needed to stay safe.

The following briefing note provides additional information. [Local Resilience Forums](#)
If you have any queries contact floodwessex@environment-agency.gov.uk.

SSDC UPDATE

SSDC have been able to deliver all required services including re-housing homeless people. Income from car parks, fees for services, collection of council tax etc. has plummeted. As local authorities are not entitled to any business grants or allowed to furlough staff costs will increase as the months go on. This issue is being taken up by all the District Councils in Somerset.

Citizens Advice Bureau reports a dramatic increase in enquiries related to employment (up by 95%) and initial benefit help (up by 82%).

SSDC has extended its phone line support to 7 days a week from 8am – 6pm, including bank holidays **01935 462462** for the following:

- 1) Information about business grants
- 2) Access to free food boxes for those facing financial hardship
- 3) Access to free food boxes for those who are vulnerable and need delivery

Virtual 'informal' meetings are now being held, with the CEO having delegated authority to act on any decisions taken.

The interim position of Director of Strategy and Support Services has been taken up by Kirsty Larkins and Nicky Hix on a job share basis. Kirsty will be half time director leading on Strategy & Commissioning and will continue to work with Simon Fox and the Planning Service.

Nicky will be half time director leading on Support Services and will retain her Finance Lead specialist role on a part-time basis, to work with the Finance Specialists.

SMALL BUSINESS GRANTS

SSDC is tasked with distributing the money for small businesses in the form of Government grants. They have so far allocated small business grants to over 1800 local business's but over 900 are still entitled to receive grants.

<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/forms/apply-for-something/business-support-grant-application/>

PLANNING

As it is proving difficult for some smaller parishes to meet, a number have asked that the deadline for submitting responses to planning applications be extended. This has been granted in some cases and I am seeking clarification to ensure a consistent approach.

PLANNING APPLICATION STATISTICS

One parish council is compiling records of all planning applications and their outcomes (where appropriate) for the last few years in order to build up a profile of what is happening in their community. This is intended as a record to help support responses to applications. I am awaiting information from SSDC in relation to applications where once approved agreement for an affordable housing element is re-negotiated

CYCLEWAY – DONYATT

At the time of writing I have nothing further to report on this.

BROADWAY – SUGGS LANE FLOODING

At the time of writing I have nothing further to report on this.

RESIDENT PARKING IN ORCHARD VALE

I have been in contact with Yarlinton and received the following in response – ‘I have spoken with our Community Partner team and Independent Living team. Neither have removed a sign from Orchard Vale, so this may have been damaged/broken in wind or removed by someone else. We are currently in the process of rebranding as part of our partnership with Radian, therefore we do not have any signs available that we can re-erect. Unfortunately we are unable to police any parking or reinforce any action against those who do not following instructions; However as you have suggested this sign improved parking for our customers, I will ask the Community Partner to explore the option of re-erecting signage once we have completed the rebranding.’

LOCAL BUSES – WINSHAM

An emergency timetable for route 96 has now been introduced by South West Coaches mainly due to very low use of bus services at present.

The winning bidder for the 99 service has withdrawn due to the current crisis and Buses of Somerset have now retained the route. The intention was to retain the current timetable but this is dependent on passenger numbers.

DILLINGTON SHINDIG

Concern has been raised about this planned event and the impact it will have on the communities in the vicinity of the Dillington Estate.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING DURING LOCKDOWN

These links may provide helpful information and advice. <https://derventiohousing.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Derventio-Distraction-Pack-Interactive.pdf>

Knit and Natter <https://www.wellbeingcollegebanes.co.uk/Activity/knit-and-natter/7542>

Exercise <https://www.wellbeingcollegebanes.co.uk/Activity/exercise-for-wellbeing-online/7534>

Support <https://www.wellbeingcollegebanes.co.uk/Activity/online-wellbeing-support-meet-up/7509>

Problem drinking <https://bottled-up.com/members/>

Mindfulness <https://www.wellbeingcollegebanes.co.uk/Activity/mindfulness-meditation-live-online-class/6814>

Creative Writing <https://www.wellbeingcollegebanes.co.uk/Activity/creative-writing-online/7562>

Gardening /Food <https://www.wellbeingcollegebanes.co.uk/Activity/gardening-and-food-growing-online/7552>

Games Group <https://www.wellbeingcollegebanes.co.uk/Activity/games-group-online/7572>

Nature <https://www.wellbeingcollegebanes.co.uk/Activity/nature-connection-online-course/7519>

MEETINGS/ACTIVITIES

1/4	Zoom training
2/4	Samaritans listening duty
3/4	SCC Covid-19 briefing
7/4	SCC Covid-19 briefing
8/4	SSDC – Area South meeting
8/4	SSDC – Area West test session
8/4	Horton Lockdown Quiz
10/4	Communities Prepared Public Health Volunteer Training
14/4	SCC Covid-19 briefing
15/4	SSDC Area West
16/4	SSDC Leader meeting
17/4	SCC Covid-19 briefing
19/4	Horton church service
21/4	SCC Covid-19 briefing
21/4	SSDC Regulation Committee
22/4	Horton lockdown quiz
24/4	SCC Covid-19 briefing
26/4	Horton church service
28/4	Police Independent Advisory Group
28/4	SCC Covid-19 briefing
29/4	Fiveways School governor meeting
29/4	Horton lockdown quiz

If anyone knows of anyone in the area requiring help or support in any way, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Stay safe and well.