

ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT FEBRUARY 2020

SCC FULL COUNCIL - BUDGET MEETING

In his statement the Leader announced an underspend for the last financial year, with £62m. in reserves. There have been no cuts to services during the last 12 months, although there remains concern, and active lobbying, over the lack of funding from central government.

Capital programmes for schools have provided several hundred additional school places, and an additional £46m. is earmarked to be spent over the next financial year. Somerset is leading the way nationally to put robots into classrooms to support children's learning.

The Chairman announced a cross-party programme to introduce first aid training in schools to all 16+ year olds. Locally, several primary schools have already taken the initiative to do this.

£1.5m. has been allocated for the introduction of advisory 20mph speed zones outside schools across the county, which will only be active during school hours.

Several large highways projects have been completed during the last 12 months and the highways Small Improvement Scheme will be open for bids again this autumn; I will be permitted to submit applications for 2 new schemes.

£2m. has been set aside to improve public transport services, with a focus on tackling rural isolation. I am actively attempting to secure funds for the Ilminster area and surrounding villages.

The elected member 'Improving Lives Fund' grants of £2,000 will continue this financial year.

In addition to extra funding from central government, SCC has allocated an extra £6.3m. for adult social care to enable an increase in payments to care providers.

A new initiative, 'Family Safeguarding', is being set up to support vulnerable families, with funds of an additional £4.5m. being provided.

A climate change strategy and action plan is to be published in late spring, with £1m. being made available this year to support parish and town initiatives; the highest amount allocated by any local authority. Alongside this is a proposal for 'planting a tree to celebrate the birth of a child'.

FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Following a letter from SSDC to all parish/town councils, it is expected that in the coming weeks and months a series of meetings will take place to ensure community engagement and to address any questions local residents may have.

Savings of £25m.+ were mentioned in SCC's Leader statement but at this early stage exact figures are unclear. The stated intention, if a unitary authority were to be formed, is for the devolution of funding elements to increase the power of local communities to make decisions. At this month's full council meeting SSDC approved the preparation of a full business case for Option 2 (Collaboration & Integration).

AVON & SOMERSET POLICE

In response to a concern raised at last month's Area West meeting relating to the Ilminster PCSO post, I have received the following from Chief Inspector Sharon Baker.

'We have vacancies in almost every team due to our best and brightest successfully applying to become PCs in the welcome uplift of officers. We are responding, and in March we have doubled our intake of PCSOs to 40. Where they get posted all depends on where they live as regulations state it must be within a specified distance. We hope to hear in the next few weeks what PCSOs we will get from the March course. Inspectors for each area will be prioritising their vacancies, as some teams/areas are more adversely affected than others.'

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

This month the budget for 2020/21 was set. There remains concern over the potential funding gap. The council tax precept has been raised by 1.99%, representing a total of £88.24 per Band D household (an increase of £1.72 p.a.), which will prevent the need for borrowing over the next three years. Savings will be delivered through the 'Safer Together' programme, including the purchase of 15 new vehicles, which will offer a greater degree of flexibility. The results of the recent government inspection have been disappointing, with some elements from the report being robustly challenged by DSFRA.

CREWKERNE/ILMINSTER SCHOOLS

Jay Mercer has been brought in as Interim Assistant Director for Education and Skills, is treating this as a priority, and met with the Head Teacher at Wadham this week. I am told that things are moving in a positive direction and an announcement should be made by Easter.

GYPSY/TRAVELLERS

This month I met with Sgt. Rob Jameson for an update on the sites across the district, and am awaiting the results of the count promised this month.

RIGHTS OF WAY

At this month's SCC Regulation Committee meeting the application for a bridleway at Long Drove, Broadway was refused. This decision is now being appealed.

WINSHAM SIS SCHEME

Highways Officer Gary Warren has now made his site visit and I met with him this month to look at his indicative plans for the scheme, which I will be bringing to this coming month's PC meeting. Unfortunately, the new officer, Stuart Fountain, will be leaving SCC this month after successfully being recruited for a position he had formerly applied for elsewhere.

DONYATT SIS SCHEME

An engineer within the team has been to site to inspect progress and is in the process of preparing a report. Much of the outstanding road sign work has been completed and vegetation cut back. Civil work and resurfacing is still to be completed.

The officer concerned is in the process of putting together a plan to progress these actions. A list of works still to be carried out has been collated and circulated to contractors.

ALLOWENSHAY WATER SUPPLY

At this month's Area West meeting a grant of £12,500 was approved to support this project.

NIPPY BUS

I met with a local resident this month in relation to the possibility of re-instating the Nippy bus service that used to cover Ilminster and the surrounding area. I have now received details of the cost of the service up until the time of its termination, and the current cost of the S1,2,3 service (£51k) and will be looking at ways to source funding.

It is hoped that additional Central Government funding for local bus services will be able to be used. The SCC Cabinet member for Highways has confirmed that he will be actively pursuing any funding available (funding from the Dept. for Transport generally comes with conditions, which SCC has to comply with to qualify) and that Ilminster transport will be a priority.

SSDC are also hoping to help facilitate improvements, particularly in the Ilminster area.

A358 UPGRADE

Local discussion in relation to the preferred route is ongoing, with a number of parishes engaging regularly. Attempts to meet with highways officers and local MPs have so far been unsuccessful. Local concern over the impact of the proposed scheme remains sceptical. It is felt that this is not just an 'A358' issue but a combined 'A303/A358' issue and that the entire 'local' road network must be considered. There must be plans in place to relieve congestion at each end of this section of the A358 - at Southfields roundabout, and Henlade, where 'dualled' 60mph traffic slows to a 30mph single-carriageway. Information on the amount of traffic 'passing through' Southfields roundabout and its direction from the A303/A358 in both directions is missing.

SSDC AREA WORKING

Area Chapters have been developed using area specific priorities identified via member workshops, along with information from the Area+ Delivery Team. Delivery plans will be developed to determine KPIs and the resources needed to support delivery. The overall approach is to enable others to deliver services where appropriate.

SSDC FULL COUNCIL

Although SSDC needs to deliver savings rising to £6m. per year until 2022, this month it announced that there will be no cuts to the budget for 2020/21, and confirmed that there will be no cuts to services. The financial plan for the year has also been approved and work has stepped up on climate change and the environment.

SSDC's decision to invest millions in new ways of working are now paying off in reduced costs. Purchasing property, which SSDC then rents out, is contributing significant income, even taking into account the cost of borrowing.

The Council Plan highlights priorities and areas of focus across the district.

For more information visit the website at www.southsomerset.gov.uk

A council tax increase of 2.99%, has been approved. increasing the annual Band D rate by £5.00 to £172.11. This includes an element for Somerset Rivers Authority.

There are 8 priority projects for 2020/21.

1. Fully realise the benefits of Transformation and further embed the Commercial Strategy
2. Progress implementation of the Chard Regeneration project
3. Continue the refresh of Yeovil town centre
4. Progress project to aid the regeneration of Wincanton town centre
5. Develop proposals to accelerate delivery of key housing sites/association infrastructures
6. Assess options for improving community transport links
7. Develop proposals to support struggling families and help address child poverty and low rates of social mobility in the district
8. Accelerate action to adapt to and mitigate effects of climate change and extreme weather.

To maximise assets SSDC has had to look for new opportunities to generate income to protect services. The Commercial Services and Income Generation team have an annual income target for commercial investment income and SSDC has invested in new technology to allow staff to deliver services more efficiently, including offering a wider range of services online.

SSDC PLANNING

In response to continued dissatisfaction in relation to officer response times I have received the following from the CEO. 'I appreciate we are still not responding to all enquiries as quickly as we might we do generally get there, but remain stretched in a number of areas though.'

It has been recognised that additional support is needed at present and this is now in place, although concern remains over the level of expertise and local knowledge of new officers.

SSDC has a duty to achieve housing targets set by central government, to meet the needs of the community as set out in the local plan. Concern remains about the barriers to delivery of housing of all tenures to meet targets.

To inform the SSDC's plan for 2020 - 2025 and the Housing Community of Practice (CoP), SSDC have commissioned a study from advisors to develop recommendations to help accelerate housing delivery across the district and to identify the best options.

I was unable to attend the workshop held this week but will have access to the findings before the Council Plan Priority Project is produced.

Whilst response from highways has improved, there remains significant unease in relation to planning application comments, and what is felt to be a lack of local knowledge.

The most recent Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) covering 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019 is now available. This is an annual statutory requirement and its purpose is to monitor the Local Plan and provide an annual performance update on planning and development components such as; Delivery and implementation of Local Plan documents against the Council's adopted timetable Identification of changes to Local Plan policies as a result of national policy or guidance updates. Housing completions, including the Council's current five-year housing land supply position Neighbourhood Planning activity undertaken by local communities

Community Infrastructure Levy receipts and expenditure during 2018/19;

SSDC ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

The SSDC portfolio holder is keen to engage with schools and plans are in motion to support schools through a schools' "Eco Warrior" scheme; it is intended that this supports the work carried out by Carymoor Environmental Educational Centre, which is active in providing waste and recycling education. Two new Environment Officers have been recruited and small working groups are to be set up, which will include elected members.

BROADWAY FLOODING - Suggs Lane

This has been the subject of much discussion. The foul drain in Suggs Lane is discharging raw sewage onto the road and is running into the river Ding. It is felt that plans for development in the area will exacerbate this problem as the sewer does not have sufficient capacity. There is also concern over the structure of the bridge.

The response from the Bridges & Structure Team is 'Any alterations will have an impact on flow and flooding elsewhere. Reinstating this to a ford will likely be a hazard to motorists and pedestrians, especially when the stream is at its peak. A long span bridge will be very costly to implement, and we have a duty to ensure that schemes are value for money and any measures we consider are proportionate to risk of flooding. We have no records of properties (5 or more) frequently flooding at this location, SCC have no current plans to alter this structure.'

I have approached the Somerset Rivers Authority for assistance, who believe that at present they are unable to help, pending the outcome of investigations.

A detailed appraisal to assess options to alleviate sewer flooding in Suggs Lane has been completed but the solution identified is not affordable. A new appraisal which is looking to transfer flows from the local sewage treatment works is currently underway, providing an opportunity to re-examine potential solutions. The SRA are also considering the impact of potential development as part of this appraisal. A further update is expected by the end of May.

Reporting Flood Incidents

Residents should report any incidences of flooding via the on-line system, which enables photos, videos etc. to be uploaded. The information is only shared with the Environment Agency, no other third parties, and is used solely for flood investigations and gathering of evidence by the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) to bid for funding when considering delivery of flood mitigation schemes. The LLFA will investigate incidents and if the flooding is significant, will carry out a section 19 investigation to consider mitigation. If flood alleviation schemes are not economically viable, they can provide advice to residents and when appropriate deliver Property Level Resilience (PLR) - the installation of flood barriers, flood doors, etc. to properties.

The link to the on-line reporting system is: <https://swim.geowessex.com/somerset/>

Carrying out Works in an Ordinary Watercourse

There is a legal requirement for anyone carrying out works in an ordinary watercourse to seek consent from SCC, as the LLFA, which also has permissive powers to carry out enforcement of the Land Drainage Act where unconsented works have been carried out.

More information is available at www.somerset.gov.uk/consent

NATIONAL CYCLEWAY AT PEASMARSH

Sustrans are keen to discuss various issues, including the condition of the cycleway surface which will, if it continues to deteriorate, present Health and Safety issues.

The SCC officer responsible for this has confirmed that this is in the ownership of SCC, but has agreed to consider the suggestion that Sustrans lease this section, as they currently do for the Peasmarsh to Chard section.

SPEEDING AT SEA

Response received from Traffic Management to local resident concerns.

'I am aware of a long-standing desire for a speed limit on this section of road. I am a frequent user of the section of road in question, but I am unsure of the volume pedestrian/cycle movements referred to regarding the cycle path, given this route follows the old train line to the west of Sea. Whilst acknowledging there have been 'loss of control' incidents throughout the bends in question, all appropriate signing is in place to forewarn motorists.

In order to introduce a speed limit we have to go through a statutory consultation process to change the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) and we have to justify the proposed changes and demonstrate that they are likely to be effective. This can be a lengthy and costly exercise.

The guidance from the DfT is clear in that speed limits should be evidence led, self-explaining and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel. They should encourage self-compliance and should be seen by drivers as a maximum rather than a target speed.

Research has shown that a change in speed limit signs alone has very little effect on actual vehicle speeds and that the speed of vehicles is moderated by the surrounding environment rather than the posted speed limit. Where motorists do not understand the reasoning behind the implementation of a speed limit, a high level of non-compliance is likely to occur, and this may lead to disrespect of speed limits elsewhere.

The key factors that need to be considered when reviewing a speed limit are: history of collisions; road geometry and engineering; road function; composition of road users; existing traffic speeds; road environment.

Police records show that there have been no personal injury collisions in this area over the last 5 years. I have checked our system and there have been no speed readings undertaken since 1997, which cannot be considered as part of any investigation. My interpretation of the guidelines is that Sea does not meet criteria for a 30mph speed limit but a 40mph may be feasible.

Another consideration is aesthetics. Should a speed limit be viable, there is a mandatory requirement for signage at set intervals, which could equate to 20 steel posts and associated signage. One final point is funding. Based on the lack of evidence, the speed limit would need to met by the Parish, which is roughly estimated at a cost of at least £5000.

GEMINI CARNIVAL CLUB

Their next fund-raising breakfast will be at Donyatt VH on Sun. 8th March 2020.

FRIENDS OF ILMINSTER LIBRARY

The coffee morning held at the end of January was very successful, with the next one being held on 28th March. In the coming months a number of events have been planned in support of library activities and improvements. Plans are afoot to install window blinds to allow for presentations to be made, in addition to consideration of providing a bicycle rack.

FoLL continues to look for new members, which at a cost of just £5 per year, is less than 10p per week! For more details contact the Chairman, David Glossop, at foil1.chairman@gmail.com

FAIRTRADE

At the time of writing Fairtrade fortnight is underway, with a focus on cocoa production. In support of this initiative there will be a family showing of the film 'Willy Wonka and The Chocolate factory' at The Warehouse Theatre on Saturday March 7th at 4pm.

PARISH COUNCIL VACANCIES

Several parishes in the division now have vacancies for parish councillors and local residents are encouraged to become involved.

ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

2/2	Horton Service of Light
3/2	Friends of Ilminster Library meeting
3/2	Meeting re: Nippy Bus
3/2	Ilminster Lit. Fest. Programme meeting
3/2	Meeting with Sgt. Rob Jameson re: gypsy/travellers
3/2	Neroche School governor meeting
5/2	Winsham PC
6/2	Fiveways School Staffing Committee
7/2	DSFRA Chief Fire Officer appraisal
7/2	Whitelackington VH quiz
9/2	Donyatt VH b'fast (Gemini Carnival)
9/2	Horton VH b'fast (Playing Field Project)
9/2	BHMC – Modern Slavery
14/2	FoIL fund raising dinner
15/2	Whitelackington VH table top sale
15/2	Broadway quiz
16/2	Horton churches combined service
17/2	Rotary youth meeting
17/2	Ilminster Lit. Fest operations meeting
17/2	Chaffcombe PC meeting
18/2	DSFRA budget meeting
18/2	Broadway PC meeting
19/2	SCC full council
19/2	SSDC full council
20/2	GDPR/risk assessment training
20/2	SSDC Area West
28/2	SCC Highways meeting re: Winsham SIS
28/2	Dowlsh Wake quiz
29/2	Horton church Lent lunch

Please note that I will be out of the country from 1st – 17th April but will endeavour to access emails regularly.