

DISTRICT/COUNTY COUNCILLOR MONTHLY REPORT OCTOBER 2020

Apologies in advance for any errors or omissions. It has been an 'interesting' month.

Useful numbers

Covid-19 emergency helpline 0300 790 6275

SCC Contact centre – 0300 123 2224

UNITARY BID

The official invitation from Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State at MHCLG to submit a business case for a Unitary Authority in Somerset has now been received.

Both the One Somerset business case and the Stronger Somerset case have been written, although both are under review to identify what further work is required in relation to consultation and engagement with partners.

In addition to SCC and the four districts, B&NES and North Somerset have also been asked if they wish to participate and submit; early indications are that they will not choose to do so. All authorities have until 9th of Nov. to respond. More info. on both bids can be found at www.onesomerset.org.uk and also www.strongersomerset.co.uk

SCC FINANCE

Director of Finance Jason Vaughan has confirmed that following a recent external audit of SCC's finances, an unqualified report was issued, reflecting that the financial statements provided were considered to be fair and transparent in compliance.

The government have announced a scheme to cover some loss of income due to Covid-19, being claimed on a monthly basis from Sept. onwards. It is estimated that £3.5m of grant can be claimed from MHCLG through this scheme. When taking this grant into account, together with the unallocated corporate contingency balance of £0.771m, the predicted end of year position is a favourable variance of £0.683m.

DILLINGTON

Dillington House is forecasted to be £1.330m overspent at year-end based on current forecasts and is mainly attributable to the impact of Covid-19.

Dillington has been closed for business since the end of March 2020 to ensure compliance. Although some activities have now started up again complying with Government Covid-19 guidance will have a significant impact on estimated income levels, being much lower than budgeted. This is particularly the case for conferences and weddings, currently limited to 30 guests. Savings on staff costs, food, bar supplies, laundry and supplies and services continue to be made where possible and have been factored into the forecast.

SCC SCRUTINY PEOPLE AND PLACE

Application backlog update

June 2019 – c. 330 undetermined applications

October 2020 – 362 undetermined applications

	Applications received	Applications determined
2018	9	9
2019	17	8
2020 so far	31	10 (potentially 17)

RIGHTS OF WAY

During a presentation this month from RoW Service Manager Pete Hoble, it was mentioned that the public believe that the definitive map is incorrect. Officers are liaising with Districts to ensure that the map is checked. Meetings with Bridleway Assocs. are being held annually, and more frequently if needed. Volunteers are wanted to adopt footpaths.

CLIMATE EMERGENCY STRATEGY

Response to recent surveys indicate that the key issues identified so far are broadly in line with public concerns.

Focus of the Strategy, goals and outcomes –

1 – To decarbonise Local Authorities and public sector estates, to reduce carbon footprint

2 – To work towards making Somerset a Carbon Neutral County by 2030

3 – To prepare Somerset's resilience to the impact of Climate Change

Sector Themes – Energy, Transport, Built Environment, Business, Industry & Supply Chains, Natural Environment, Farming & Food, Water, Waste & Resources, Communications

Action plans, future funding and delivery

- Initial high-level plans have been developed
- Identify actions to begin the journey towards carbon neutrality
- Cost known actions, identify lead organisations and set timescales for delivery
- Work on understanding other significant actions in more detail, and define costs
- Carry out detailed feasibility studies to identify project funding
- Prioritise actions and secure funding for delivery
- Propose delivery governance arrangements to Somerset Leader/Chief Exec. group

DISPOSAL OF COUNTY FARMS

SCC officer Charlie Field has provided this update. Parshalls Farm House is on the market with some good interest shown. SCC intend to pursue some planning applications for the farm buildings at this site and have agreed terms with the carnival club so that they remain on site for another year till their new "home" is built. SCC will let the majority of the farmland. The proposed sale of the site at Dollings Pool Dairy progresses.

The tenant at Coldharbour has moved out, and we have applied for planning permission on the farm buildings.

POLICE – RURAL CRIME

As part of regular focused activity, neighbourhood teams in South Somerset and the Mendips took part in a pro-active operation targeting Rural Crime offenders, providing reassurance to farming and local communities. This involved dozens of Police staff, including those from Dorset and Wiltshire, who patrolled 100s of miles, stopped dozens of vehicles and visited farms and communities across the area. The highlights;

Vehicle stopped in Chard for no insurance.

Driver wanted on a European arrest warrant and was detained, his vehicle was seized.

At least 2 other vehicles stopped with no insurance, and seized.

2 males who had been in our area were arrested for theft from motor vehicle

Prompt reaction to reports of suspicious activity on a farm.

Male found with drugs parked up in a layby.

The strategy of the 4Es approach - engage, explain, encourage and enforce - has served the communities of Avon and Somerset well, striking the balance between education and enforcement. Although moving faster from encouragement to enforcement to reflect on gravity of the health situation, to date only 388 fixed penalty notices have been issued.

COVID-19 UPDATE

There has been an increase in Somerset cases during the last few weeks. Regular updates have been distributed as I have been in receipt of them.

SSDC FC

At this month's meeting I was appointed to the Scrutiny Committee

After much debate two motions were passed; one in relation to the prevention of badger culling on SSDC owned or managed land, and also, ahead of a member's briefing, concerns expressed over the recent planning white paper issued by the Secretary of State for MHCLG.

PHOSPHATES

This is an emerging picture. Phosphate levels are too high, which is damaging the ecology in the Somerset Levels and Moors RAMSAR site. As a result, SSDC is unable to approve any new development in the catchment for the Levels until a mitigation strategy is agreed. The development affected is anything with wastewater such as residential, commercial and tourist development, or agricultural development that increases the herd size, and therefore increases the phosphate output of the site. The catchment is across most of the district, and many applications are on hold as a result as SSDC are not issuing decisions that are going to result in an impact on phosphates (leading from wastewater) within the catchment.

The Councils of Somerset met this month and are obtaining a tender invitation with a view to producing a Somerset Nutrients Strategy

SSDC will be writing to all agents about this once wording is agreed.

SSDC are not refusing anything on the basis of impact on phosphate levels at present but a large number of applications are on hold at the moment until the situation becomes clear.

<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning/phosphates-on-the-somerset-levels-and-moors/>

SW AMBULANCE SERVICE

In response to an enquiry from a local resident I have received the following: We have no plans to close Ilminster Ambulance Station. From January 2021 we will realign our operational resource levels from the station as part of Our People Plan to increase conveying by double crewed ambulances (DCAs).

This is being delivered through new investment and transferring our current single crewed Rapid Response Vehicles (RRVs) into new DCAs, which is in line with our regional and national ARP (response standards) plans to both improve our initial response to patients and to ensure those who require immediate conveyance to hospital receive an appropriate DCA resource as quickly as possible.

These changes will see the current RRVs based at Ilminster redeployed into additional DCA hours across Somerset, which will not only benefit the local community in Ilminster but our wider population across the county.

CHRISTMAS TREES

Unfortunately SSDC are unable to offer the service this year as workload will not allow for staff shortages or wood chippers due to the loss of production during Covid-19 lockdown. Where possible, SWP and SSDC would like to encourage people to consider replanting trees, home composting or adding them to a corner of the garden as a wild habitat. Where that's not possible, anyone subscribing to the SWP Garden Waste Service can leave their tree out next to their garden waste bin for collection. The usual restrictions apply – branches should be less than 15cm or less in width. Anyone not subscribing to the service can take trees to any of the county's 16 recycling

sites <https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/recycling/centres/> for the garden waste skips.

Other collection points may be available, and in due course these will be publicised.

SOMERSET WASTE PARTNERSHIP

All 16 Somerset recycling sites are now on winter timetables: weekday sites operate 9am-5pm, weekends 9am to 4pm. For details, go to www.somersetwaste.gov.uk
To manage essential tasks, without the need for emails and phone calls, residents and businesses can now access the pull-down menu at www.somersetwaste.gov.uk to check collection dates, order free recycling boxes, Bright Blue Bags, food waste bins and kitchen caddies, arrange paid-for bulky waste collections, buy garden waste sacks and request garden sack collections, and report any missed collections after 7pm on the due day. Composting bins are currently on offer - 220-litre for £10 and 330L for £12.50, in addition to a buy-one-get-one-half-price deal for two of the same size. Delivery is £9.99 per order but this can be combined with a neighbour or friend. Go to www.getcomposting.com
Clothes recycling - clothes and shoes good enough to be worn again can be put out in kerbside collections, tied in a bag (not black sacks) to keep completely dry. No textiles, such as bedding, will be taken.

HIGHWAYS MATTERS

ILMINSTER TC

Agreement has been reached not to remove 2 parking spaces along Silver Street after consultation with businesses in the town.

BROADWAY

Once again there have been concerns about speeding. Highways has responded with: 'Although we understand and appreciate residents' concerns about vehicle speeds and road safety unfortunately there is no easy solution. There is already a speed restriction in place in Broadway, it is therefore a police matter to enforce this. The 30mph signage is correct throughout village as per Department for Transport criteria.

The other option maybe a SID (speed indicator device). We are happy to work with local councils to help them use their own devices. There are legal responsibilities, and a duty of care to road users and installers, which come with the placing of SIDs on the highway and therefore this cannot be a casual arrangement. There are also risks involved with working near busy roads where the speed of traffic is a concern, therefore SCC needs to help safely manage such work on the highway.

Any new SID requests must have the support of the parish council and County Councillor and be funded by them (the PC, not me!).

I will pass your comments regarding the use of Broadway Road as part of the diversion route to my colleagues in Street Works.

HORTON PLAYING FIELD PROJECT

The application for an SSDC community will be discussed at the Nov. Area West meeting.

FIVEWAYS SCHOOL

I have now been appointed as the Training and Equal Opportunities Governor.

SSDC NEW PLANNING VALIDATION GUIDE

This has been in place now for over 3 months. Feedback is being addressed and at present it is felt that requirements are too onerous for normal applications.

SSDC PLANNING REFORM

Key points agreed by the working group.

- All Information to be sent digitally in future.
- Town and parish councils to respond within 21 days.
- Increase in enforcement activity.

Following a number of requests for information, the following update was received: SSDC recently went out to permanent recruitment for a Lead Specialist but did not secure a suitable candidate. Barry James has agreed to remain in post in the Interim role for the next few months. Performance figures show a reasonably positive picture, but the Planning Service is where it should be. Many of the benefits of Transformation have yet to be embedded in the Planning Service. SSDC are determined to ensure we have a Planning Service able to deal with some of the challenges that remain, including backlogs, modernised systems, improved technology and excellent customer service. After discussion with the Chief Executive and other Directors as Project Team has been put in place, to resolve the issues, improve the quality of the service, and move forward in a different way. This includes the timeliness of applications and breaches.

There have been some recent resignations from the team, and plans are in place to ensure that all staff have a challenging but do-able case load, and receive the support they need to deliver excellent services.

The Project has 4 work streams and work has been done with the Service Delivery Leadership team to re-task some individuals to support this work.

Project Manager, Kirsty Larkins is aware of the issues faced and is also continuing in her part time role as the Director for Strategy & Commissioning.

Technical Planning Lead, Barry James will be working with the Project Team, as the most senior Planner and continue to finish off the Planning Reimagined Workshops, and implement the changes needed.

People Lead, Sharon Jones will take over line management of all the staff in the Planning service to provide consistency.

Change Lead, Jan Gamon, will work on leading change, as there are a number of procedures and processes that need work to ensure the most efficient and effective Performance/Chair of the Project Team Meetings, Netta Meadows will also join the Project Team, leading on Performance monitoring.

SSDC will also be engaging short term additional Planners, to assist with the workload and fill the gaps whilst they recruit 3 Permanent vacancies, following some recent departures, and appoint a permanent replacement to the Lead Specialist role in the New Year.

CYCLE TO SCHOOL INITIATIVE

A £2 million initiative has been announced to help more children to cycle or walk as part of their commute to the classroom. The funding is part of a wider plan to create safer streets for cycling and walking and to encourage more people to choose active travel.

An in-school cycle repair scheme is to be set up in primary schools and local neighbourhoods to ensure children's bikes are fit for the road.

'Doctor Bike' clinics will be rolled out, targeting areas where children, including those with disabilities, are likely to need support to get bikes roadworthy for regular school run use.

A further £1 million has also been announced to boost the number of children walking to school. The Walk to School Outreach Programme is being extended to roll out further measures to support walking.

Bikeability training has also recently restarted in schools, helping children gain confidence and boost their cycling skills.

ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

1/10	SSDC District Exec.
1/10	Isle Valley Benefice coffee morning
4/10	Horton service
6/10	SSDC planning reform
6/10	Ilminster TC highways committee
6/10	Broadway PC
7/10	Meeting re: Ilminster/Crewkerne schools
7/10	Winsham PC
12/10	Horton prayers
12/10	DSFRA Resources committee meeting
13/10	Fiveways School Staffing Committee
13/10	Governor Services Head Teacher Performance Appraisal training
14/10	SSDC Area East
14/10	SCC Scrutiny Policies & Place
14/10	DSFRA Resources Committee
15/10	DSFRA Member forum
14/10	Horton quiz
15/10	Licensing in the Covid Era training
15/10	SSDC FC
16/10	Interview and Recruitment Techniques Training
16/10	Unconscious Bias Management Training
16/10	Listening and Questioning Skills Training
18/10	Horton service
19/10	Horton prayers
19/10	Museums of Somerset AGM
19/10	SSDC Planning White Paper briefing
19/10	Neroche School governor meeting
20/10	SSDC CEO meeting
20/10	Governor School Complaints Training
21/10	SCC Cabinet meeting – Future
21/10	SSDC Planning re-imagined working group
21/10	DSFRA HR Committee
21/10	Horton quiz
22/10	SSDC Audit Committee
22/10	Isle Valley Virtual Coffee morning
22/10	SSDC Circular Economy webinar
23/10	DSFRA Board meeting
24/10	Climate Emergency
25/10	Somerset & Avon Police intervention
27/10	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service meeting
28/10	Horton Quiz
29/10	Isle Valley Coffee morning
30/10	Samaritans Recruitment Training
30/10	CAMHS Outreach enhanced support meeting