

ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT REPORT SEPTEMBER 2020

FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Both the One Somerset case, submitted by SCC, and the Stronger Somerset bid submitted by the four district councils have now been sent to the Secretary of State. We await further developments. Parish and town councils have been invited to attend a series of virtual meetings to consider the two proposals.

COVID-19 UPDATE

SSDC still considers that in-person Council meetings are inappropriate at the present time and that virtual meetings are a satisfactory substitute. Parish and town councils should continue to check guidance published by NALC or SALC.

The current view is that although the Principal Regulations continue to permit local councils to hold meetings (an exemption to the rule of 6 limit) in COVID-19 secure premises, NALC recommends that councils continue to meet remotely.

SSDC's finances continue to be impacted, with loss of income and increased expenditure despite grants from the Government.

SSDC have successfully paid out the total allocation of discretionary grants to businesses. 205 businesses have benefitted at a value of £1,928,000. Awards to 3,122 businesses were granted, totalling £36.7m.

SSDC's Environmental Health team continue to meet with Public Health and the other districts in Somerset to monitor local infection data and review control measures, with an emphasis on identifying risk areas and containing infection rates.

There has been a 100% increase in noise complaints.

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

I have been appointed to the Officer Appeals Panel.

SW COUNCILS EMPLOYERS PANEL

At this month's meeting I was re-appointed to the position of Vice Chair. The 2.75% pay offer to local government workers was discussed and concern raised over the challenges for the ability of employees to take their full annual leave entitlement due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. Staff continue to be encouraged to work from home where possible.

Consultation is now live, seeking views on proposals for reforming exit payment terms for local government workers; redundancy severance payments are to be limited to a max. of 66 weeks (down from 144 weeks) and capped at £87,000. Changes for options to pension arrangements are also part of the consultation, along with protection for zero hours contracts.

POLICE

The police were granted extra powers from 28th Aug. to fine organisers of illegal gatherings of more than 30 people up to £10,000. Those who attend gatherings, and those who do not wear face coverings where it is mandatory, can be given a £100 fine, which will double on each offence up to £3,200. Since the easing of lockdown, normal levels of demand have resumed. In August, 90,000 calls were received, with almost 60,000 via the 101 non-emergency line. Of these non-emergency calls, 399 were directly related to COVID-19 breaches.

Within the 399 calls, there were 149 calls reporting suspected raves or unlicensed music events. The police responded to 101 of these incidents. Of those not attended, most were either not in our force area or cross referenced to another incident.

International travel return and quarantine - The National Triage Centre was set up to provide a central hub to identify people returning from trips abroad and distribute details of individuals to local police forces to dip sample compliance for quarantine on their return.

Neighbourhood Teams took part in a week of action to increase awareness and disrupt County Lines, including:

A search warrant at a premises in Yeovil with drugs, money and phones seized

Working with British Transport Police on trains between towns to identify young or vulnerable people who may be susceptible to being exploited

Visited over 100 places of work, schools and businesses to raise awareness of County Lines
Identified those at risk of being targeted, those exploited before, visiting them with partner agencies to make sure safeguarding was in place

A bid for Government Surge Funding aimed at helping to tackle Serious Violence, was successful, enabling additional pro-active activity in obtaining more civil orders and injunctions on those causing most harm.

INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP

Avon & Somerset Constabulary are proposing to deploy 5 mobile fingerprinting devices to give officers the ability to take the fingerprints of individuals reasonably suspected of having committed an offence, or attempting to commit one, and where the name of the person is unknown, or cannot readily be ascertained. A positive return will provide identity information to the officer to make an informed decision on the course of action to take. Confirming identity at the scene may negate the need to arrest the person and take them to a police station to ascertain their identity.

There has been some drug related activity reported in Chard, in part related to youth activities. County lines remains a concern, and a number of successful operations in Yeovil have resulted in the disruption of such activity.

Beat Manager Lisa Hallett has now left. A new beat manager will be starting in Oct.

A national campaign has just begun to recruit more police officers.

The Police and Crime Commissioner is conducting a survey of public opinion on police and crime services in the area. Please complete the survey via this link:

https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/news/2020/09/do-you-have-thoughts-on-your-local-police-service/?utm_source=john&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=opcc-covid-survey

GYPSY/TRAVELLER UPDATE

The Outreach Team have been busy with rough sleepers, which have shown an increase. The lack of authorised gypsy/traveller sites in the county remains a challenge.

Whilst restrictions imposed by the pandemic continue it has been recommended to:

Cease Enforcement Action where an unauthorised encampment is in a safe space.

Provide Sanitation and Water facilities where an unauthorised encampment is being tolerated, and it is safe to do so, to reduce the chance of infection.

Provide a temporary transit site in each District. South Somerset feels that it can manage any encampments in place rather than have a dedicated site. These provisions are intended to provide facilities and services, giving a secure space for a travelling family to stop if one of them is displaying symptoms or suffering with COVID-19, and provides a safe space to enforce if needed. Over some years local authorities have been granted funds for the gypsy/traveller community. In South Somerset, whilst funds have been used, there is a balance available of approx. £120,000.

YEOVIL HOSPITAL

A update was received by CEO Jonathan Higman this month. In the last 12 months there were 42k admissions, of which 6k were to A&E, where 97% of patients were seen within 4 hours; the best record in the country. The hospital currently has 2,300 employees and in their last CQC inspection received a good overall rating (outstanding for emergency response).

The main focus of international recruitment is the Philippines and Dubai.

A recent staff survey received a 72% response rate, the highest in the country.

Expenditure this year has reached £200m., including Covid-19 related costs.

HIGHWAYS - ILMINSTER TRAFFIC CONCERNS

There is a new process for setting up Speedwatch in the area. Previously a Road Traffic police officer would carry out the assessments and training. This role has now been transferred to local Beat Teams, who are still waiting for full clarification and training. Elaine Costanza at Yeovil police station is the contact person for those interested. Elaine.Costanza@avonandsomerset.police.uk

Having been made aware of two incidents in Ilminster I contacted our local PCSO, and received this response: 'I am aware of the two incidents you mention in Ilminster and am obviously concerned whenever any incidents occur. I have looked into both of these mentioned incidents and can report that neither of these incidents were speed related.

1. a driver reversing. who did not see the person walk behind, and they didn't see them reversing.
2. someone pulling out at a junction and someone crossing the road, one not seeing the other.'

In relation to concerns raised over 20mph zones in Ilminster, a mobile camera unit has been requested (mainly for North Street) to monitor speed levels as traffic enters the town.

As Ilminster has an active Fire and Ambulance service it is likely that traffic calming measures would not be put in place. It has been suggested that residents contact the Town Council to take matters further. Along New Road, it is considered that the volume of traffic would prevent vehicles travelling at over 30mph. There is no weight limit for New Road, the 7.5 tonne limit is just for High Street to the old Police Station. Tractors going about agricultural duties do not come under weight limits. It is felt that although farm traffic is an inconvenience, unfortunately it is part of rural life.

The issue of designated resident parking at Orchard Vale is ongoing and remains unresolved.

Yarlington are planning to replace a sign previously been sited adjacent to their properties.

A fatal traffic accident occurred this month on the former A303 east of Whitelackington village near the entrance to the Dillington Farms and Estate. In response, there has been renewed interest in the introduction of a 30 mph speed limit, which in this case may have helped to avoid a fatality. Currently the standard 60 mph applies and the advisory 30 mph speed limit, is largely ignored.

SSDC FULL COUNCIL

At this month's full council meeting a majority decision was reached to support the Stronger Somerset business case put forward by the four districts.

SSDC AREA WEST

Agenda items this month largely related to planning applications and appeals related to other communities within Area West.

Broadway & Horton Cricket Club were awarded a community grant of £4,567 towards the purchase of new nets.

SOMERSET CLIMATE EMERGENCY COMMUNITY FUND

£1m. of SCC funding was made available earlier this year for town and parish councils to support local communities. A new grant scheme is now available. From Oct. you are invited to bid for between £5k and £75k for projects to reduce carbon emissions. Applications do need to be submitted via parish or town councils.

To find out more go to www.somerset.gov.uk/climate-emergency

FROG LANE

Several local residents have been in contact with me in relation to the overgrown footpath. It is proving difficult to establish ownership so that action can be taken.

ILMINSTER/CREWKERNE SCHOOL REVIEW

The appointment of officer Amanda Walker has meant that there has been some progress in relation to the future of education in the two towns. An announcement is expected to in early Oct.

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

I have been part of an independent review of the authority's governance arrangements that is being carried out by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS).

The lack of readily available COVID-19 testing for firefighters is of concern in relation to pits potential impact on officer availability.

This month I took advantage of the free Home Safety visits offered by the service and would strongly recommend all residents to do so. Call 0800 05 02 999 or email firekills@dsfire.gov.uk



COMMUNITIES HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT – Planning White Paper

Several online meetings have been held with the Minister for CHLG, Robert Jenrick, this month. My notes It is thought that there is a strong case for unitary authorities from the perspective of housing delivery, although this could be achieved by local authorities having joint plans. Protecting and enhancing green belt designated land is felt to override housing need. There seems to be broad support for introducing an infrastructure levy centrally, but allowing local authorities to collect and allocate how it is spent. Concern has been raised over regional disparities and considering is being given to area weighting. Growth areas are expected to largely correspond with existing allocated sites of some size. Local housing need is being updated but the proposal is not intended to be binding; more of a starting point for discussion to allow time for new planning reforms to come into play. It is important to strike a balance between urban development and 'levelling up' with rural demand. Any local government reform must have 'broad local support'. The Planning for the Future consultation planningforthefuture@communities.gov.uk which closes at 11:45pm on 29 October 2020 provides local residents with the opportunity to participate and express their views. <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/MHCLG-Planning-for-the-Future/> Feedback suggests that the questions are lengthy and complex, where even professionals have struggled to respond.

SSDC PLANNING

There is now an increased focus on enforcement and conservation, and a training video is planned to support town and parish councils in being able to respond appropriately when consulted on planning applications. Report templates are also being produced, with the aim of achieving greater levels of consistency.

The total number of planning applications received is 44% down on the same period in 2019. Enforcement cases rose by 28% compared to 2019. Since the introduction of the new system that is being put into place, there have been 17 enforcement cases reported in Area West.

Fee income is down by 36% on the same period last year.

Backlogs are increasing but are comparable to last year; turnover of staff has affected efficiency. West Area: 25 10. Of the 57 appeals submitted 14 were allowed. The number of cases that were determined by Committee and subsequently appealed is six (2 in East, 2 in West, 2 in North). Of those six Committee decisions appealed five were allowed. 11. Requests for costs were made alongside 4 of the 6 Committee-related appeals. Three of these were granted, either partially or fully. No request for an award of costs were submitted with appeals following delegated refusals. The application for 8 dwellings at Paulls Lane, Broadway was dismissed on appeal.

A number of parishes have recently been in contact with me in relation to concerns over breaches of planning conditions. To report this, use the following link:

<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/services/planning/report-a-planning-breach-and-planning-enforcement/>

SSDC 2020/2021 FIRST QUARTERLY REPORT - PLANNING

Measure (frequency of reporting)	Description	Target 20/21	Q1 20/21	Q2 (19/20)	Q3 (19/20)	Q4 (19/20)	Perf against target	Direction of travel	Supporting information
Speed of processing – planning applications – major (Quarterly)	The % of valid major planning applications determined within 13 weeks	60%	93.75%	89%	76.9%	100%	●	↔	Major applications can be considered determined 'in time' if they are determined within 13 weeks. If beyond the 13 week period there must be a signed extension of time (EoT).
Speed of processing – planning applications – minor (Quarterly)	The % of valid minor planning applications determined within 8 weeks	70%	95.03%	90%	92%	94%	●	↔	Minor applications can be considered determined 'in time' if they are determined within 8 weeks. If beyond 8 weeks there must be a signed extension of time (EoT).
Speed of processing – planning applications – other (Quarterly)	The % of all valid other planning applications determined within 8 weeks	80%	96.86%	96%	96%	96%	●	↔	Applications can be considered determined 'in time' if they are determined within 8 weeks or if beyond 8 weeks with a signed extension of time (EoT).
Planning appeals lost as a % of all decisions (Quarterly)	The number of appeals to the Planning Inspector lost (i.e. decision overturned) expressed as a % of all decisions	10% (max threshold)	3.39%	2.00%	0.88%	0.83%	●	↔	

ILMINSTER LIBRARY

Iminster library will be opening for browsing from Tues. 6th Oct. Current opening hours are:-

Monday closed

Tuesday 10.00 – 4.00

Wednesday 10.00 – 12.00

Thursday closed

Friday 10.00 – 4.00

Alternate Saturdays 10.00 – 12.00

The number of people allowed into the library at any one time is limited to 5 to ensure social distancing. The service has now expanded to enable customers to choose their own books. "library choice" is still offered for customers who would like library staff to select books, taking books and DVD's on their behalf. The Royal Voluntary Service continues to provide home delivery for those who are housebound, have caring responsibilities or isolating due to Covid-19.

BROADBAND

Given our new ways of working, which often involve working from home, the provision of reliable Broadband access remains a challenge for many smaller rural communities in this area. Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) launched a new procurement process to contract services for the building of full-fibre networks across Devon and Somerset in February and expect to have the contract(s) awarded by December 2020. Once this procurement has completed, we will have a much better idea of precisely which premises are due to benefit in the roll out build. More information can be found at www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/category/news/

In the meantime, properties within Somerset may be eligible for other schemes, notably the Gigabit Voucher Scheme. This scheme is available to residents and businesses in rural areas to enable them to work with suppliers to fund gigabit broadband for whole communities. Projects need to be of two or more residents/small businesses and have current speeds of less than 100mbps. Vouchers for residential premises are between £500 - £1,500, while SME's can be up to £3,500. Full eligibility and terms can be found at <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/rural/>

Within the website, there is a post code checker which allows residents and businesses to check if their post code area is currently eligible for vouchers. The search result will not only say where an area is eligible but will also show which suppliers are active in that area.

The Community Challenge Programme is an initiative by CDS that could be used to provide support to communities who choose to go down the voucher route. If communities choose this solution, CDS would be able to provide more information and support at that time.

Summary for South Somerset

Total premises: **84,700** (*the number of homes or businesses in the area*)

CDS superfast achieved: **49,900**

CDS superfast planned: **315**

Commercial superfast achieved: **23,844**

Commercial planned: **1,280**

Total delivered or planned: **75,339**

Remaining: **9,361** - CDS is seeking to cover as many remaining premises as possible through a new £38 million programme and supported by £18.7 million of Government funding

Take-up of CDS funded broadband services is nearly 70% compared with a national average of 61.4%, an increase of circa 5% over the last quarter.

ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

1/9	SSDC Scrutiny
1/9	Broadway PC
2/9	SSDC planning reform workshop
2/9	SSDC Area South meeting
2/9	Horton quiz
3/9	SSDC District Exec.
4/9	DSFRS Member Forum
4/9	Fiveways School Staffing committee
6/9	Horton service
6/9	Horton prayers
7/9	Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020 briefing
7/9	Ashill PC
8/9	SSDC Scrutiny
8/9	ILF AGM
8/9	SSDC Licensing
9/9	SSDC Area East
10/9	SSDC DX
10/9	SSDC full council
14/9	Museums of Somerset meeting
14/9	Dept. for Communities Housing and Local Government meeting
14/9	Donyatt PC
15/9	Iminster TC
16/9	Police Independent Advisory Group
16/9	Broadway planning meeting
16/9	SSDC Area West
18/9	SW Employers Panel
18/9	SW Employers Council
20/9	Horton service
21/9	Horton prayers
21/9	Neroche school governor meeting
21/9	Horton PC
22/9	Chaffcombe PC
22/9	Iminster Lit Fest Ops meeting
23/9	DSFRA Home Safety meeting
23/9	Horton quiz
24/9	Isle Valley Benefice virtual coffee
24/9	Fiveways school governor meeting
25/9	DSFRA CFO appraisal
27/9	Horton service
28/9	SCC Officer Appeals Panel
29/9	1-to-1 with SSDC CEO
29/9	SSDC Scrutiny
29/9	PCSO familiarisation event
30/9	Horton quiz