

ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT AUGUST 2021

This month there has been a significant amount of additional information made available in relation to several key local government areas of operation. In an effort to ensure that, as much as possible, these monthly reports are kept to a reasonable length, I have attached as separate files documents relating specifically to:

- Unitary Authority timetable for next steps
- Community Infrastructure Levy Governance
- SouthWest Waste Partnership service update

Some of you may have already been in receipt of this information, for which my apologies.

FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOMERSET

Until plans for the new authority are confirmed, a website holding page has been set up to provide further information, <https://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk/>. This can be used for individuals and local community groups to express their interest in becoming involved in the consultative groups being created to work in partnership with key stakeholders over the next 18 months to help shape future public services.

DIARY DATE – 7TH October – Somerset conference for parish/town clerks and Chairs, to consider the principles on which Local Community Networks may be developed, and to include discussion around asset and service devolution as required.

A Local Government Advisory board is to be established. All five authorities are in the process of agreeing on the membership of this along with cross-party consultation groups. In order to avoid the time and expense in transferring across the 10k contracts, in addition to the transfer of 4k employees across the five authorities, it is understood that the preferred model for the new authority is for a 'continuing authority', but this has yet to be agreed.

The Sec. of State has requested a unitary authority boundary review (different from the proposed parliamentary boundary review) to be undertaken by Oct. which could mean that the current 55 county council divisions will be replaced by approx. 85-95 unitary councillors, equating to 5.5k electors per councillor. Any new proposed boundaries will be presented to parliament at the same time as an appendix to the statutory orders early in 2022.

Whilst confirmation has yet to be received, at present the intention is for elections for the new authority to be held in May 2022, with the new authority being vested on 1st April 2023.

PARISH/TOWN ELECTIONS

The creation of a new unitary authority means that elections to the shadow authority will now be held in May 2022. With this in mind, SCC and the One Somerset team have asked for the views of parishes and towns on whether or not the next ordinary elections (due to take place in May 2023), and which would have coincided with the next district council elections, should be moved forward to 2022. Agreement to do this would reduce the cost to parishes/towns of holding separate contested elections, which would have a financial advantage for smaller parishes with limited resources.

Moving parish/town elections forward to 2022 will mean that all elections will be in sync with principal authority elections going forward. It has been reiterated that any decision to bring forward parish/town elections, or not, will be up to individual parishes. As time is limited, your thoughts and ideas are requested by the end of Sept. at the very latest.

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE (DSFRS)

I have been appointed as a member of the Local Government Association Fire Service Management Committee Board.

HMICFRS will be undertaking their second round of inspections from the 31st Aug. for about nine weeks, interviewing people from across the service and carrying out focus groups. It is felt that significant progress has been made since the 2019 inspection, despite Covid-19, but it is also recognised that further improvements will be required.

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COVID UPDATE

I have been forwarding weekly reports as received. Trudi Grant, Director of Public Health, Somerset in a recent interview has said 'People must remain cautious. Even though national rules have relaxed we have our highest rates of infection so far. We need to make people aware that even if they are fully vaccinated, they need to remain careful and use all the infection control measures we have had in place....although obviously voluntarily.' Somerset continues to have one of the highest vaccination rates in the country with the latest figures showing over 94.5% of the adult population having had one dose of vaccine and 84.6% having had both doses.

INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP - Avon and Somerset Constabulary

In response to a considerable amount of correspondence and contact in relation to local policing matters, this month I invited local parish representatives to attend a virtual meeting with the Chief Inspector and the Police & Crime Commissioner, to provide the opportunity to allow concerns to be expressed in person. Disappointingly, just one person attended. I am advised that for those wishing to report traffic/accident 'near misses' the online reporting form is quicker and simpler than dialling 101.

<https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/report/>

SSDC OFFICER CONTACT & AREA MEETINGS

A number of local residents and PC members have been in contact with me over their concern at the cancellation of Area meetings recently, where it is felt that this has traditionally provided an opportunity for public engagement with elected members and officers, which is being denied them. In addition to this, of particular concern is the inability of both members of the public and elected members to be able to engage with officers directly, either by email or telephone, causing the electorate to feel disenfranchised.

SSDC AUDIT

A number of questions have been raised in relation to the audit function at SSDC. Auditors have flagged up concerns relating to the management process of S106 monies, which total £4.9m., and the lack of information provided so far. Transformation has given rise to some areas of concern, especially over IT. A request has been submitted for additional information in relation to the ongoing monitoring of investment in current regeneration projects. The Director for Commercial Services & Income Generation remains on sick leave.

PLANNING

Ongoing planning delays are being experienced as officers continue to work with applicants to find solutions to the ongoing problem in relation to phosphates. Several appeals against SSDC planning decisions have been granted recently, causing concern.

The timescale for validating planning applications has improved considerably. Changes to planning officer personnel are ongoing. This lack of stability and continuity has caused some frustration, along with the increasingly lack of ability for applicants and parishes to have direct contact with the department. In Area West, John Hammond, will be covering the role of Lead Specialist whilst SSDC run a recruitment process which will commence immediately.

CIL spending governance

A Community Infrastructure Levy workshop was held this month, information from which is attached. A table of Community Infrastructure Receipts for 2019/20, show receipts for: Donyatt £1,506; Dowlish Wake £24; Horton £1,053.30

BUSES

The frequency of some bus services in Somerset will be increasing from next week Starting on Sunday, Sept. 5th, in line with many schools and colleges returning, most services will return to pre-Covid 19 service levels. In addition, the general public will be able to board timetabled college services.

From Sept. 6th, SCC will reintroduce weekday restrictions to concession pass holders, which will mean no free travel before 9.30am.

HIGHWAYS

There has been little movement in resolving a number of outstanding concerns relating to highways issues, but the police have been active in carrying out speed checks locally. I met both with local residents, and Highways officers, at Donyatt to agree plans for drain/gully maintenance in an area prone to flooding.

A358 DUALLING

There is to be a briefing session with members of the National Highway's (formerly Highways England) project team for the A358 Taunton to Southfields dualling scheme. The will session include preliminary design of the route and the ongoing engagement with local communities. There will be an opportunity to ask any questions.

Wed. 15 Sept. 2pm refreshments, meeting 2.30pm - 4pm Dillington House

If you would like to take part virtually email

A358TauntontoSouthfields@highwaysengland.co.uk.

If you have any further questions get in touch on 0300 123 5000

A new project newsletter link has been provided to give regular updates [A358 Taunton to Southfields Community update](#)

<https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/villagers-rat-run-fears-plans-5831200>

FLOODING

There is to be a Somerset Prepared Community Resilience Day on Monday, 4th Oct., with free, interactive online training with emergency incident responders and volunteer organisations, organised by the Somerset Prepared Partnership.

To register your interest and book training sessions, visit www.somersetprepared.org.uk

A list of contact details is being compiled to help support Flood Wardens and Community Emergency Volunteers and enable the Flood Warning Duty Officer to make contact. Email floodwessex@environment-agency.gov.uk with details of named volunteers, the community's name, and contact number.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The impact of climate change remains high on the agenda for many of us. This month I met up with interested parties to hear their views on 'Green' matters.

Those interested in receiving regular updates and getting more involved can contact bill.linton@myphone.coop

A number of groups in the area are intending to participate, by holding events for the upcoming Great Big Green Week (18-26th Sept.), organised by the Climate Coalition, of which the Fairtrade Foundation is a member. Go to www.greatbiggreenweek.com or <https://ilminsterexperience.co.uk/the-great-big-green-week/> for more details.

A Fairtrade bake-off and coffee morning is being held at Sweet Surprise on Sat. 18th Sept. between 10am and 12pm (9am for cake entries and judging).

The event will see homemade bakes, using at least two Fairtrade ingredients (with evidence!). The cakes will be served alongside Fairtrade tea and coffee, with a 'virtual' high street displaying the various Fairtrade items currently available in Ilminster.

CARBON REDUCTION

As a result of the installation of LED lanterns, 56% of Somerset's street lighting is now eco-friendly, contributing towards its 2030 carbon neutral target. LED replacements have seen a reduction in carbon, down from 9,522 tonnes in 2015/16 to 3,278 tonnes in 2020/21. A reduction of 6,244 tonnes of CO², resulting in 31.75% energy saving equal to £950k p.a.

WASTE COLLECTION/RECYCLING

This has generated a good deal of upset amongst local residents and businesses. Whilst the situation has been significantly problematic in some areas, I am reassured that active measures are now in place to rectify the issues as quickly as possible, including a number of recruitment and retention incentive schemes. Updated information is attached.

Although problems with waste collections can be reported to www.somersetwaste.gov.uk there have been issues in accessing the site. To file a complaint, select 'Comment or Complaint' on the dropdown box under "My Waste Services"

Missed collections can also be reported by calling [01935 462 462](tel:01935462462)

Concern has been raised over the sickness absence of SSDC's Street Scene Manager.

CHARD REGENERATION PROGRAMME

For a variety of reasons, including inability to secure funding and partner participation, as well as a significant increase in costs in the Leisure Centre construction compared to original estimates, some aspects of the programme will not now reach completion. The main elements that will now be delivered include the leisure centre and the High Street Action Zone (HAZ), part funded by Historic England. The leisure centre is nearing completion and is expected to open to the public later this year, in Nov.

RURAL BUSINESS GRANTS

Grants of up to £5,000 are now available to help rural businesses bounce back after the pandemic. The grants (up to 80% of project costs) are available to assist service businesses to become more sustainable, subject to 20% of their own match funding. The application process is open to Sole Traders providing rural services, Businesses providing rural services, Town and Parish Councils; Local Community led organisations operating on a not-for-profit basis and legally constituted. The fund, which is part of the wider £6m Somerset Recovery Fund, will **close at 5pm on 10 Sept. 2021**. Initial applications will be treated on a first come, first served basis. Details and application form can be found at www.somerset.gov.uk/business-and-economy/somerset-recovery-fund

ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT FUNDING (ARG)

The scheme was designed as a one-off lump sum payment by central government to Local Authorities to use at their discretion to support businesses during the restrictions that commenced in Nov. 2020. Further allocations have been made in three tranches and SSDC currently has £1,037,779 remaining for ARG spend until Mar. 2022. Any unspent monies will need to be returned to central government. More information can be obtained at <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/3880/south-somerset-additional-restrictions-grants-arg-24112020.pdf>

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BROADBAND

I continue to wait for a response from Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) in relation to enquiries made by local residents who have concerns about ownership of a non-completed Gigaclear installation.

There have also been complaints about lids missing from Gigaclear Points Of Termination (POTs), that may cause an accident. The main cause of the problems appears to be a direct result of the early termination of the CDS contract with Gigaclear.

Gigaclear contractors "installed" the POTs in the most convenient places, often with the tops raised above ground level. As a result, quite a few have had their lids strimmed off, mowed off or hit by heavy vehicles as a result. Questions are being raised as to liability should an injury result.

ILMINSTER TREE PROJECT

Local residents, community groups and business, are invited to join Green Ilminster in planting 7000 trees, one for every man woman and child living in the area.

In addition to enthusiastic volunteer planters, landowners are needed to give their permission for planting. The idea is to create a 'Jubilee Wood', for the Queen's celebrations next year. If you can help in anyway, make contact at greenilminster@btinternet.com or 07816213428.

In support of the project, I am in contact with SCC over the possibility of the town acquiring land below Herne Hill, which is currently in SCC's ownership.

Natural England has said, 'This government initiative is intended to reverse the decline of nature in the UK and set Britain on a path to becoming "nature positive" by 2050'.

Environmentalist, Tony Juniper, adds 'I have never seen this level of attention, ambition and activity on the natural environment. The decline of Britain's carbon footprint will be met with the creation of new habitats and landscapes.'

CREWKERNE/ILMINSTER SCHOOLS

Building works to facilitate the transition of school organisation in Crewkerne and Ilminster is to be undertaken. Approval has been sought to appoint Futures For Somerset Ltd. to project manage the delivery of remodelling works, and to carry out a competitive procurement exercise on SCC's behalf. The total estimated cost is in the region of £3.5m. Following concerns over the safety of children when moving between Greenfylde and Swanmead sites, an initial meeting has been held with highways to consider what action needs to be taken.

Permission had been granted for two families to challenge SCC's decision to change the three-tier system to a two-tier model for primary and secondary schools.

Additionally, a second case argues the decision to merge Swanmead and Greenfylde schools is discriminatory against those with no religious beliefs.

ILMINSTER LIBRARY

Members of the Friends of Ilminster Library group visited Shepton Mallet Library this month to generate ideas for increasing activities at the Ilminster Library. A meeting to discuss options is to be held with SCC officers this coming month.

Input is requested from local residents. Those interested in becoming involved can contact the Chairman, David Glossop, at foil1.chairman@gmail.com

CARE LEAVER SUPPORT

As part of SCC's commitment to support care leavers, its Care Leaver Guaranteed Interview Scheme has been extended to anybody who was in care as a child, wherever that was, and whatever their age now. This means people who have been in the care of a Local

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Authority for a significant period before the age of 16 and apply for a job with SCC will be guaranteed a job interview – provided they meet the essential job criteria.

Independent research shows that care leavers are a particularly vulnerable group for council tax debt and in view of the recent announcement on Local Government reform in Somerset, SSDC is considering the approval of extending the use of the local discretionary powers to increase the existing Care Leavers discount from April 2022. In line with other Somerset authorities, it is intended that a 100% council tax discount be given up to age 25.

AFGHAN REFUGEES

SCC is committed to help a scheme to house Afghans who supported British military and to resettle interpreters and translators. SCC anticipates the Government will fund a number of places for refugees with strict rules on the types and locations of suitable accommodation. Anyone who would like to help in anyway should contact resettlement@somerset.gov.uk

ILMINSTER CARNIVAL QUIZ

The Shrubbery Hotel, Wed. 29th Sept., 7.15pm start.

Tables of 4, £10 per table.

ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

2/8	Isle Valley prayers
2/8	Meeting with Robert Jenrick
2/8	The Minster
3/8	SSDC Scrutiny
3/8	Isle Valley service
3/8	Warehouse Theatre
4/8	Somerset Levels Flood Alleviation Project
4/8	Winsham PC
5/8	SSDC District Exec.
6/8	Isle Valley prayers
6/8	Whitelackington quiz
8/8	Donyatt VH breakfast – Gemini Carnival Club
8/8	MIND
8/8	Isle Valley prayers
9/8	Friend of Ilminster Library
9/8	The Minster
9/8	Ilminster Literary Festival
10/8	Highways meeting Donyatt
10/8	Friends of Donyatt Despatch
11/8	Horton quiz
13/8	Horton resident social services
15/8	Isle Valley service
16/8	SSDC Scrutiny
16/8	Chaffcombe PC (briefly)
17/8	Isle Valley prayers
17/8	SSDC Regulation committee
17/8	SSDC District Exec.
19/8	SSDC full council
20/8	The Minster
20/8	Sweet Surprise
20/8	Donyatt water supply
21/8	Green Party event
22/8	Broadway Hill Methodist Church lunch
22/8	Donyatt Church re-dedication
23/8	Sweet Surprise
23/8	MIND in Somerset
23/8	Meeting with Avon & Somerset Police
24/8	SSDC Community Infrastructure Levy workshop
24/8	Ilminster Lit. Fest meeting
24/8	Somerset Waste Partnership briefing
27/8	The Minster
27/8	Isle Valley prayers
28/8	Winsham Show & Art Exhibition
29/8	Party on the Park
29/8	Chillington open air service
29/8	Winsham Fun Day
29/8	BHMC lunch
29/8	Retirement tea for Ashill Baptist Minister
31/8	SSDC Scrutiny
31/8	Boundary review briefing