

## ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT JULY 2021

### FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOMERSET

## Proposed timetable in summary

Jul/Aug 21	Sep-Nov 21	Dec/Jan 21/22	Feb 22	May 22	1 April 23
S of S Decision	Negotiation of Structural Change Order	Structural Change Order to Parliament for approval	Structural Change Order approved by Parliament	Elections to Shadow or Transitional Authority	Vesting Day - New Unitary(s) come into effect
1st meet with MHCLG	Joint Committee Created		Joint Committee created (if not already in place)		Councils abolished
	Implementation Plan				Boundary Review (April onwards)

## Proposed timetable to implementation 1

August 2021 (first week)	First meeting between MHCLG and Chief Executives
September-November 2021	MHCLG prepare Structural Change Order to deal with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abolition and winding up of councils</li> <li>Ending of members term of office</li> <li>Number of councillors</li> <li>Transfer of functions to continuing or shadow authority</li> <li>Constitution of implementation or shadow Executive</li> <li>Appointment of officers (shadow)</li> <li>Duty to co-operate</li> <li>Implementation Plan</li> <li>Implementation Team</li> <li>Election Timetable</li> </ul>
Between September 2021 and December 2021	Creation of Joint Committee
December 21-January 22	Structural Change Orders laid before Parliament

## Proposed timetable to implementation 2

February 2022	Parliament considers Structural Change Orders
February 2022	Joint Committee comes into effect (if not already in place)
May 2022	Elections to Shadow or Transition Authority
February 2022 – April 2023	Approval of Consequential Orders: transfer of functions, staff, assets, pensions
1 April 2023: Vesting Day	New Unitary(s) take effect and existing councils dissolved
April 2023 onwards	Boundary Review

The announcement was made this month by the Sec. of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to implement, subject to Parliamentary approval, a proposal for a single unitary council for the whole of Somerset.

The process has not been without controversy, and the decision may yet be challenged. In the meantime, the CEOs and leaders of all five Somerset authorities are in communication while they plan the next steps, as outlined in the tables on the previous page. Going forward, in the interim period, until plans for the new authority are confirmed, a new website has been set up to provide further information.

<https://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk/>

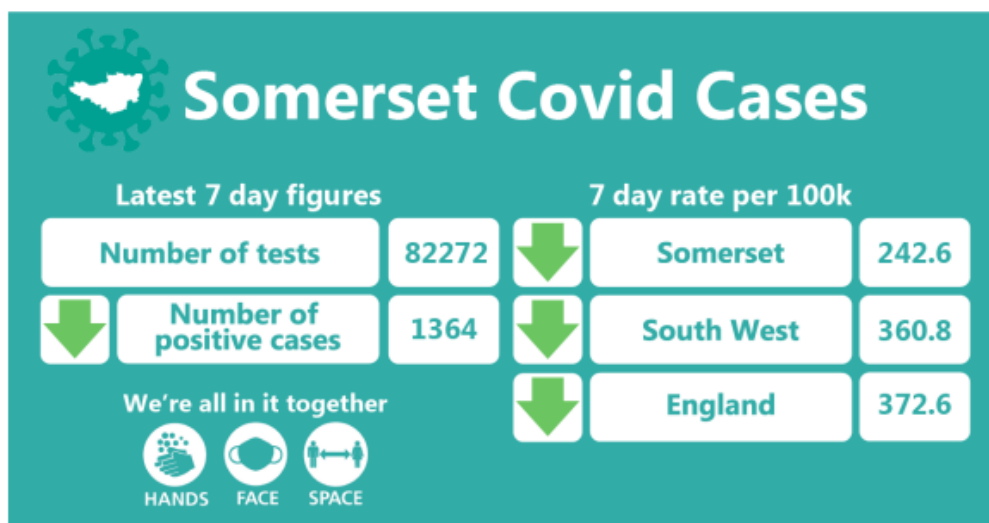
A question and answer sheet has also been circulated, but I understand that some of the answers are inaccurate and am awaiting confirmation of the correct information.

A series of consultative groups has been created to work in partnership with key stakeholders over the next 18 months to help shape future public services. Expressions of interest in becoming involved are invited from individuals and organisations

**DIARY DATE – 7<sup>TH</sup> October – Somerset conference for parish/town clerks and Chairs**

## COVID UPDATE

Somerset cases remain high but there has been a reduction of rates in the last week. It is too early to be sure why cases are falling; it may not mean there is less virus circulating. There are also many cases of Long Covid being reported nationwide. To keep yourself and others safe you should get vaccinated, continue to participate in testing, and self-isolate when required. Although no longer a legal requirement, it is recommended you wear a face covering, keep your distance, meet outdoors and ensure indoor spaces are ventilated.



The Department of Work and Pensions has extended its Covid Local Support Grant, providing £1.4m to SCC who is using the grant to fund food vouchers worth £15 per week for children eligible for Free School Meals over the six-week Summer Holidays.

SCC has been shortlisted for three national awards in recognition of its work during the coronavirus pandemic. 'Best Workforce Transformation' for its redeployment work during the pandemic, 'Community Heroes' for the work of Community Council for Somerset's Village and Community Agents, and 'Delivering Better Outcomes' for Somerset's Micro-providers, who proved a lifeline for Somerset's isolated rural population throughout.

## SSDC FULL COUNCIL

This month saw the first face-to-face meeting of SSDC's full council, at Westlands Yeovil. The appointment of the new Chief Exec. was confirmed. Jane Portman, who has extensive experience of local authority government at all levels, will take up the post in mid-August.

## **SW COUNCILS**

In response to the 3% pay claim of local authority officers, The National Employers Assoc. have made a final one-year offer of an increase of 1.5% on basic salary, with effect from 1 April 2021. The final outcome is not yet known.

## **ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVIEW**

The Boundary Commission has issued initial proposals for electoral boundary review. This is the first step in the process and consultation has begun. Some changes are proposed for Somerset, and at present it is not clear whether or not the proposals will directly impact on the Ilminster division and associated wards.

## **DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE (DSFRS)**

Praise has been received in relation to the key part the authority has played in supporting services during the pandemic. The authority is due to have its HMI inspection in the next few weeks. Preparations have included a focus on prevention and firefighter productivity. Two areas identified as requiring further work, are improving firefighter fitness, and the ability of the authority to demonstrate sufficient equality and diversity amongst its workforce.

## **INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP - Avon and Somerset Constabulary**

To ensure that needs are met in relation to changing the behaviour of offenders, a model has been agreed to assess the needs of offenders; the critical needs around their offending behaviour and also their holistic needs, including employment and mental health. This service will be called ASCEND (Avon and Somerset Constabulary Engage Navigate Divert). Criminal behaviour affects not just the community but households and dependants within those households and ASCEND hopes to reduce risks and adverse experiences. Where a case is identified as suitable for a Community Resolution or Community Caution, they will be referred to ASCEND, after consultation with the victim. A similar model implemented across a number of forces, is showing positive results, with a reduction in re-offending, reduced harm and reduced costs. A key element are the interventions used as conditions.

## **SSDC UPDATE**

The following points have recently been raised by elected members:

- it would be useful to have local and national context to understand how SSDC is performing compared to other authorities.
- ward members want reassurance of being 'kept in the loop', and continued involvement regarding planning applications submitted to Regulation Committee.
- timeframes and processes for notifying parish/town councils, especially those which do not meet monthly, has hampered their ability to comment on planning applications
- enforcement remains of concern; often a controversial subject at parish meetings. A breakdown of enforcement queries and how these have been reported, is requested.
- a planning training video is being produced. It is not clear whether or not it will be available to parishes. Concern has been raised about the ability to keep it up to date.
- additional briefings for members on technical elements are to be considered e.g. how people can report enforcement issues.
- in response to queries relating to the Community Infrastructure Levy, a member workshop has been arranged for this coming month.
- members have asked for an update on the status of the current Local Plan review.
- at a recent meeting of the Scrutiny T&F group with Crown Commercial services, it was confirmed that all the electricity bought by SSDC is now from renewable sources

### **CEO budget overspend**

Information was received in response to a query of the overspend on the CEO budget:

**Efficiency of Service = £105k** - One off efficiency of service cost

**Director Post = £108k** - Unfunded director post

**Transformation = £100k** – Anticipated savings from transformation were not achieved in the current year, further work will be done in 2021/22 to identify the requirement.

**Future Somerset = £29k** – Additional spend (which includes the £94k additional cost of the poll), the reserve amount set aside to cover the cost was not sufficient, the additional £29k has been charged to the Chief Executive budget.

**Consultants Costs = £23k** – Consultants cost in respect of a fly tipping issue

Members noted that additional training regarding capital and interest payments would be useful, and that the capital and revenue budget reports have been delayed until Sept.

### **PLANNING**

Planning reform measures are still in progress. Validation of applications is now taking just a week, largely as a result of the new procedures in place, and additional staff recruitment.

**Freedom of Information requests** – the intention is to set up an Fol section on SSDC's website so that it has a platform in its own right and all Fol data (answers and responses incl. deadlines, breaches etc...) will be fully visible and transparent.

**Appeal decision** – in a recent appeal, the inspector stated that it was felt that some of the sites that have received planning permission are not likely to be deliverable and that a 20% buffer is required to accommodate this.

**5-year land supply** – the inspector found that SSDC no longer has a five-year land supply, which will have an impact on planning applications. The inspector also raised concerns over the impact of the uncertainty around phosphate mitigation solutions on housing delivery. It is felt that in forming this opinion some assumptions may have been made.

This reduction in land supply is also in part due to the impact of Covid. It is hoped that a solution to the phosphate issue may be in sight by the autumn. Planners will then prioritise those applications to get up to 5-years as soon as possible.

SSDC have been asked to provide an up-to-date detailed analysis, by Sept., of what housing supply there actually is. For the time being, applications, including speculative applications and other schemes, which would not normally be approved, are more likely to be approved due to the presumption of there not being a five-year land supply.

The planning application for a Carnival Park at Kingstone has been withdrawn.

### **WASTE COLLECTION/RECYCLING**

I have received a considerable number of complaints from across the division in connection with the new waste/recycling scheme now in place. The complaints largely focus on missed collections or a lack of understanding as to the correct collection days for individual items. The service is aware of their failings in this area and are doing their best to resolve issues that are raised. A key problem has been the forced isolation of some refuse collectors, and also a national shortage of HGV drivers. Recruitment is being actively sought to try to remedy the situation. Problems can be reported to [www.somersetwaste.gov.uk](http://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk) although I understand that there have also been a number of issues in accessing the site.

## HIGHWAYS

This month has seen an unprecedented amount of correspondence relating to access, parking, speeding, blocked drains and road closures. Where possible, highways officers have made visits to sites in response to the issues raised by residents, who remain frustrated at the lack of resolution; in many cases this lies with enforcement activity, rather than action by highways. Swift remedial action is often hampered by funding, and legal restrictions on any mitigating highways activity. There is also a high level of concern in relation to traffic accidents; in almost all cases incidents have been due to driver behaviour. The following concerns remain outstanding:

- Ashcombe Lane - parking
- Listers Hill – lack of dropped kerbs preventing disabled access to the town
- Whitelackington – speeding at the Dillington junction
- Donyatt Hill – restricted visibility
- Sea, Donyatt, Chaffcombe, Kingstone – speeding
- Butts – parking restrictions
- Ilminster and Chaffcombe – blocked drains and gullies

## DOG BINS

This remains a topic of interest, particularly in rural communities. When a request is made for the installation of an additional bin, an assessment needs to be carried out to determine if additional bins are required, before agreement is reached to approve the increased cost to the service for the ongoing emptying of them. Parishes may make suggestions as to where and why an additional bin is needed (is there a fouling problem, or is the desire to just make life more convenient for dog walkers?). If there is a fouling problem, a locality officer will patrol the area and record their findings of the levels of fouling. Once this has been established, signage and education will initially be used to try and tackle the problem. Only if this is unsuccessful, the location and levels of use in existing bins would be reviewed, before more units are installed.

## HELICOPTERS

Concern has been raised by residents at Rapps over the frequency and height of low flying helicopters in the area. Contact has been made with the commanding officer at Yeovilton.

## RIGHTS OF WAY/FOOTPATH ACCESS

I continue to receive regular complaints in respect of overgrown footpaths and hedges in Ilminster, especially around Canal Way and Listers Hill, going up towards Gooch & Housego, and along the route to Donyatt Halt. The overgrowth in some areas is such that access for pedestrians is severely impaired, particularly for those with mobility problems. In response, I have been in contact with both the Rights of Way team and highways asking for this to be treated as a priority. In some cases, establishing land ownership has hampered the ability to resolve the issue.

A number of queries remain in relation to the legal status of some footpaths in the division.

## ENVIRONMENT

I have received notification of a tick warning: With the warmer weather ticks thrive in woodland, long grass and parks. SCC has provided a 'tick list' to reduce the risk of being bitten including: Walking on clearly defined paths, wearing light coloured clothing, using an insect repellent, wearing long trousers and long-sleeved tops to reduce the skin exposure and carrying out a regular tick check after outdoor activities. Being bitten does not usually require hospital treatment but people are advised to dial NHS 111 if they start to feel unwell.

## 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](http://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](mailto:floodwessex@environment-agency.gov.uk) with details of named volunteers, the community name, and contact number.

There have been a number of arrangements in place where authority has been given from the police to members of the public and volunteers to close roads in the event of flooding. Following recent consultation with SCC's Highways Team, which is responsible for road closures during flooding, and due to the potential personal risks to those individuals involved, it has been decided to withdraw these police authorities to close roads in the event of flooding with immediate effect. The Council will now handle all closures directly.

## COMMUNITY GRANTS

From time to time, I receive requests for information concerning grants for community funding, which may relate to play equipment, village hall activity, etc. This link to SSDC's website may be a helpful source of information as to what projects may be supported.

<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/your-council/your-council-plan-and-strategies/communities/grants-and-other-support-for-the-voluntary-and-community-sector/>

## HIGHWAYS ENGLAND A358 DUALLING

HE have now reviewed and considered suggestions from parish councils and community groups along the route. They have emphasised that any changes to the design must be in line with the scheme's objectives, including a commitment to improving safety along the A358 Taunton to Southfields route for all users, to avoid unacceptable impacts on the surrounding natural and historic environment and landscape, and consideration of the additional impact on affected landowners. Some changes have been made, which will be subject to statutory consultation.

A number of the suggested proposals include slip roads onto and off of the road, which HE are unable to include as they do not meet the required design standards. However, HE think there is merit in some of the suggestions and have raised further queries with specialist teams to feed into an ongoing appraisal of the proposals. This includes looking at each option against the scheme objectives, including environmental impact and cost. Reasons will be given for any decision taken.

HE are currently working on updating their traffic model to use the most recent figures available. This model will be used as part of further assessment. HE plan to meet with local community groups in Sept. or Oct., ahead of statutory consultation.

Queries can be made by contacting [A358TauntontoSouthfields@highwaysengland.co.uk](mailto:A358TauntontoSouthfields@highwaysengland.co.uk) or calling 0300 123 5000.

As HE develop their plans for the upgrade, teams will be out and about around the route to complete essential surveys of the local area and environment. To do this, traffic has been reduced to a single lane on the A358 between Taunton and Southfields roundabout **from Monday 26 July to Friday 6 August 2021** on weeknights only, **between 8pm and 6am**. Because this is a single lane closure, a temporary traffic lights system is in place. For more information, [go to the scheme website](#).

## BUSES

Following the Government's announcement of the new National Bus Strategy – 'Bus Back Better' a £3 billion pot of funding is being made available to improve bus services. SCC is intending to bid for a share of this in partnership with operators. In order to do this, you are urged to complete the following survey to identify residents' experience and where the gaps in services are. <https://someset.inconsult.uk/someset.bus.survey/consultationHome>

## BROADBAND

A workshop was held by SSDC, with a presentation from Broadband provider, Jurassic Fibre. They are their own Internet Service Provider offering a range of services and price structures, currently based on a one month rolling contract and with no installation charge.

## Where and When?

- Typically we build out towns where our PoP sites are located in the 6 months following the release. We aim for a minimum 99% coverage everywhere we build.
- Yeovil is in construction right now, and we expect to be building in Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster early in the new year. The first villages surrounding these locations can expect service in around 12-18 months.
- Our 'On Demand' programme looks at areas with existing poor coverage and expressions of interest received via our website to help our design teams ensure those most in need are included.
- We can use Government Vouchers, but to date our business case has enabled us to build without subsidy.
- Register expressions of interest via our website (Jurassic-fibre.com). Community Champions can also contact us directly to discuss options and to be kept informed of progress.



Winslade Park, Clyst St. Mary



Hangtime Café, Exmouth

River Exe Café, Exe Estuary



Crossfit PL, Woodbury

Ocean Exmouth

## ILMINSTER LIBRARY

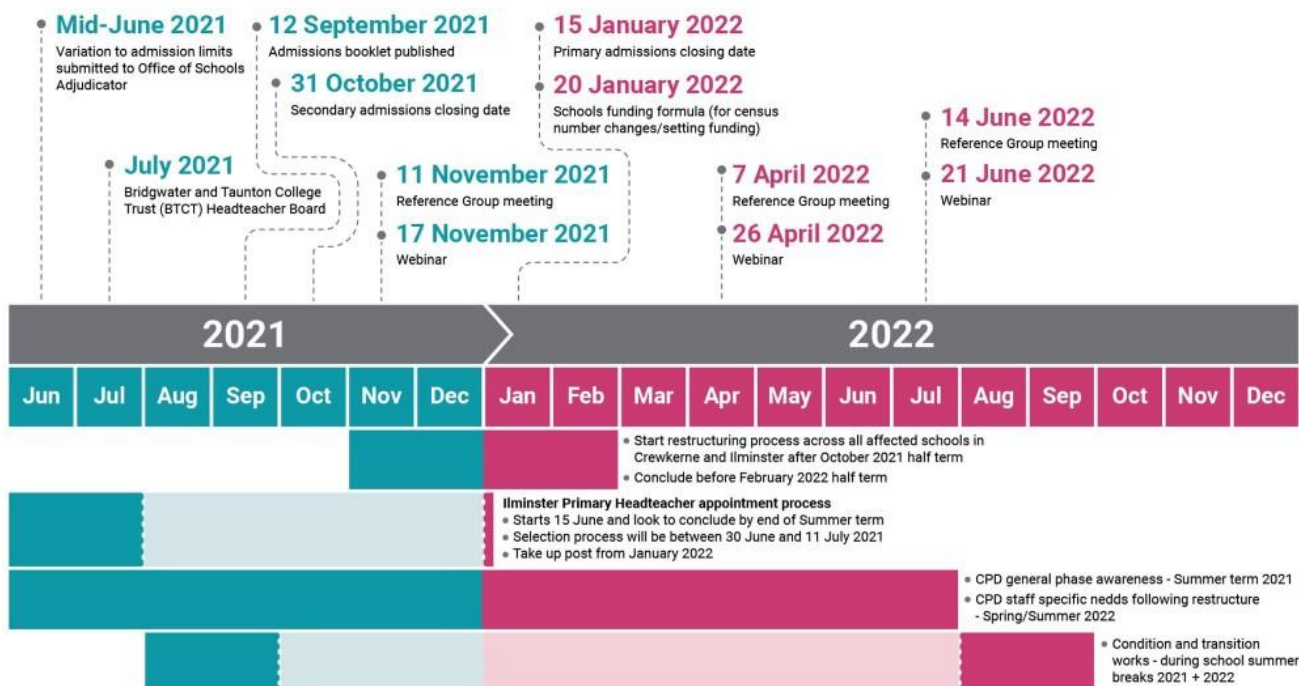
A virtual meeting was held this month with representatives of the library service and Friends of Ilminster Library volunteers. It has been a difficult time, with a huge decrease in footfall, but plans are being considered for ways in which FoIL can continue to support the library. It was confirmed that the library is no longer under threat of closure. 500k children have signed up for the summer reading challenge and library users are reminded to support pop up libraries this summer.

As part of Somerset Libraries' response to an initiative, funded by The BBC and the Arts Council, it is inviting people to share their experiences of the last sixteen months, to be recorded for future generations. As part of 'Reflections', libraries will host a series of free drop-in sessions throughout August and online via social media. The collaborative artwork and film will be given to the SW Heritage Trust as a 'record' of the experiences of Somerset people during the pandemic. The film and artwork will then be showcased at the evening 'Reflections' event to be held at Taunton Library on the 10 Sept.

<https://www.someset.gov.uk/libraries-leisure-and-communities/libraries/reflections/>

## CREWKERNE/ILMINSTER SCHOOLS

Following the decision for Ilminster/Crewkerne schools to move to a two-tier system, the current head teacher at Greenfyld School, Claire Oaten was successful in being appointed as the head of the new school, which will operate across a split site between Greenfyld and Swanmead. Mark Walker, the head of Swanmead, will be leaving in December. Following concerns over the safety of children when moving between the two sites, an initial meeting has been held with highways to consider what action needs to be taken.



## ILMINSTER EDUCATION FOUNDATION

At this month's meeting a number of awards were given to qualifying pupils, and consideration given to the possible future impact of schools moving to a two-tier system.

## FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

I continue to be cautious about attending face-to-face events, making my decisions on a case-by-case basis.

## SCAMS

Having completed Cyber Security training this month, I am conscious of the varied methods criminals are using to fraud internet and email users.

I have been alerted to a new scam involving unsolicited calls from "DPL" (Drain Protection Limited) who assert that you have reached the end of their two year 'free' period and must now start paying ££ each month, stating that if you do not agree then you will be charged for the two 'Free' years.



**ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS**

1/7	SSDC District Exec.
1/7	Christians Against Poverty Refresh conference
1/7	Horton resident Abri meeting
2/7	The Minster
2/7	Connecting Devon & Somerset – Broadband
2/7	SSDC Capital Investments scrutiny briefing
4/7	Horton Zambia day service
5/7	SSDC Appointments panel
5/7	Ashill PC
6/7	Kingstone highways meeting
6/7 - 8/7	Local Gov't Assoc. conference
6/7	Whitelackington annual parish meeting
6/7	Broadway PC
8/7	SSDC District Exec
8/7	SSDC Full Council
10/7	Chard Museum fund raising event
11/7	St. Peter's Horton service
11/7	Isle Valley prayers
12/7	The Minster
12/7	Warehouse Theatre – Greenfylde School
12/7	Donyatt PC
13/7	SSDC Licensing Committee
13/7	Broadway – planning site visit
13/7	Somerset Partnership Bus meeting
14/7	SSDC Area East
14/7	SSDC Area North
14/7	Broadband workshop
14/7	Horton quiz
15/7	SCC Health & Wellbeing board
15/7	SSDC Leader's meeting
15/7	Fairtrade meeting
16/7	Fiveways school governor meeting
18/7	Ashill service for Alan Knight
19/7	FoIL library meeting
19/7	DSFRS forum meeting
19/7	MIND in Somerset
19/7	Chaffcombe PC
20/7	Swanmead School awards
21/7	Isle Valley prayers
21/7	Police IAG
21/7	SSDC Area West
22/7	SSDC member briefing
22/7	Fiveways school
23/7	Chard Museum
24/7	Chard Museum
25/7	Isle Valley service
26/7	DSFRS
26/7	Ilminster Lit. Fest meeting
27/7	Emergency First Aid at Work & Defib. training
29/7	SSDC Audit committee
29/7	Cyber Security Awareness training
29/7	Ilminster Education Foundation meeting
30/7	The Minster
30/7	BBC Radio 4 Any Questions
31/7	The Warehouse Theatre