

ILMINSTER DIVISION – SSDC/SCC COUNCILLOR REPORT AUGUST 2016

Please note that as previously advised I will be out of the country from 15th – 30th Sept. I will still aim to access my emails regularly should any urgent matter arise.

SSDC NEW CHIEF EXEC.

SSDC announced the appointment of its new chief executive this month. It is Alex Parmley, formerly of Eastleigh Borough Council. He will take up his post on 3rd October.

SSDC TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

A number of workshops were held covering a variety of topics last month. Consideration has been given to customer access, signposting and simplification of documentation. There is acknowledgement of the continued need for local offices to provide face-to-face personal contact. Organisational structure changes will be made, combined with early specialist intervention. Changes in customer behaviour and improving response times through training and further integration of services was also discussed.

SCC MEMBERS ALLOWANCES

SCC has published its annual report of members' allowances for the year 2015/16, mine shown below. Those wishing to view the entire document may do so via SCC's website.

L Vijeh (Ilminster Division)

Vice-Chairman, Scrutiny Committee for Policies, Children & Families (SRA)

Scrutiny Committee for Policies, Adults & Health

Basic flat rate allowance - £10,582 + Special responsibility allowance - £936 =

Total allowance received - £11,517 Travel & Subsistence expenses - £1,191

PERSONAL SOCIAL CARE BUDGETS

BBC Radio Somerset news highlighted an auditor's report for SCC this month, suggesting they may have 'misinterpreted' the reporting of client numbers in receipt of personal social care budgets in 2013. Later interviews revealed that all local authorities across England had appeared to do the same.

HIGHWAYS

SOMERSET ROAD CASUALTIES

The figures for the first quarter of 2016 have now been released, showing a 33% reduction overall when compared with the same quarter last year:

5 fatal; 34 serious; 303 slight injuries.

Casualty type - Pedestrians 23% - (down) Motorcycles 33% (up) Pedal cycles 23% (down) Cars/Taxis 6% (up)

Road user type – Motorcyclists 24; Pedestrians 30; Car occupants 262; Cyclists 20

M25 upgrade at JCT. 25

SCC is proceeding with consultation, design, planning and procurement for this project, having reached agreement with Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership's Local Growth Fund (HotSW LEP) to draw down funding of up to £175k, subject to approval of the business case. This will increase capacity at the junction and access to the Strategic Employment Site. The preferred strategy will require a lead contractor to be appointed by April 2017, to deliver the scheme to programme. The investment will further the objectives of SCC's County Plan: A thriving local economy, attracting jobs and investment, improved broadband connections and road links like the A303, to help businesses and residents.

<http://www1.somerset.gov.uk/council/portfolio%2046/2016/M5%20Junction%2025%20>

LPV – SCC/SSDC County/District Report August 2016.

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ROAD RE-SURFACING

SCC is now using innovative methods to recycle 70% of road material for re-surfacing carriageways. Whilst not suitable for every scheme, it means that work that normally takes several months can be completed in weeks; keeping costs down and better for the environment by reducing the need to transport materials.

HIGHWAYS WORK UPDATE

Whitelackington – Stocklinch Road - Drainage improvement works. Temporary road closure. 3 Oct – 27 Oct. 20 days

Ashill - Thickthorn Lane - Drainage improvement works. Temporary road closure. 12 Dec – 23 Dec. 10 days

ILMINSTER - A local resident has contacted me over concerns in relation to parking at Townsend restricting access to enable maintenance of those properties facing the roadside.

HORTON - Concern has been raised over the timescale of the Five Dials SIS scheme, along with fears over the increase in traffic at Neroche School due to development.

DILLINGTON ENTRANCE – Local concern over the closure of the gate at Whitelackington end of the estate continues. Discussion to resolve the issue is ongoing.

ASHILL – A complaint was received this month in relation to overgrown vegetation at Forest Mill Lane and the impact this has on visibility at this junction with the A358.

DONYATT

Speeding through Donyatt remains a problem, along with instances of dangerous driving.

LITTER

Concern and adverse comments have been expressed by some residents about the amount of litter on the grass verges from:

- (1) Southfields roundabout Ilminster to Folly Drove Ashill, and
 - (2) Southfields roundabout Ilminster through Donyatt to Hornsbury Mill, Chard
- There has also been the issue of the disbursement of thistle seeds in areas of Ilminster, and the resulting impact on the local environment.

I can report that the StreetScene team's response is always swift, where resources allow.

POLICE

Crime Commissioner for Avon & Somerset, Sue Mountstevens has published her first newsletter since being re-elected.... Seeking public views on a number of issues.

Neroche - PCSO John Martin has indicated his willingness to attend PC meetings if invited.

PLANNING

I have attended several meetings this month in relation to local concerns over the impact of a number of planning applications. In all cases I have made contact with those concerned to ensure that their views receive appropriate consideration before any decision is made.

SYRIAN REFUGEES

<http://www1.somerset.gov.uk/council/portfolio%2040/2016%20decisions/Expansion%2>

Somerset gave an initial commitment to resettle six Syrian families under the Government-funded Syrian Vulnerable Resettlement Scheme. A working group has overseen the resettlement process, including monitoring pressure on existing services and financial balance. This initial resettlement has been very successful. It is now proposed that Somerset offers resettlement for up to 30 more vulnerable Syrian families over a 3 year period, continuing to be on the basis that private rental properties are used and that there is capacity to support families without undue impact on services to local residents. Of particular concern is the impact on school places.

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN

Their arrival is imminent under provision in the Immigration Act 2016 for the SoS to enforce agreement if this is not forthcoming voluntarily. SCC has been asked to allow for the transfer of up to 71 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children on arrival in the U.K., as Children Looked After, under national dispersal agreements. SCC has a statutory duty to support and accommodate children that are in need or have been abandoned.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children meet these criteria. A multi-agency working group has been set up to implement the practicalities, supporting new arrivals and making contact with local community/social/religious groups.

The Home Office has historically provided some financial support.

New national transfer rates 1st July 2016 - 31st March 2017

Under 16 - £114 (daily) Age 16 -17 £91 (daily) Leaving Care £200 (weekly)

Funding is unlikely to cover all costs, such as increased staffing and specialist therapeutic input for children who are traumatised. If not supported, they are at high risk of being the victims of, or being drawn into crime, and also trafficking and child exploitation. Locally such risks will be mitigated through strong community partnerships to support and protect them.

SCC LISTENING, LEARNING, CHANGING ROADSHOW UPDATE

SCC is continuing the process by consulting town and parish councils about several issues: A rapidly ageing population, inflation and the National Living Wage, along with more people needing social care support, means that costs will rise.

There is also a need for more jobs in Somerset. Consultation questions include –

- What is considered to be a fair and reasonable increase in council tax
- Levels of support for setting up a University, business parks to attract jobs, a Garden Town and putting Somerset at the heart of new energy initiatives
- Support for devolution
- Areas of focus for public health matters

SCC still faces difficult decisions about where savings can be made, where service reductions will have to be made, and how SCC can work more efficiently with other organisations, in addition to planning Somerset's long-term prosperity and sustainability.

Council Tax

There is no desire to increase Council Tax, but with reductions in core Government funding (£15m in 2016, and about £40m by 2020) and growing demand for services it cannot be ruled out.

Vision for Somerset

This forms part of the County Plan looking ahead to 2020.

University for Somerset

To encourage young people to stay and study and attract talent from further afield, producing graduates skilled for the jobs Somerset needs, increase employment

opportunities and help businesses to grow. SCC is talking with education providers and the Government to consider ways to move forward; making land or buildings available, getting key stakeholders and organisations talking, and coordinating approaches to Government.

Garden Town

To help address the housing shortage in Somerset. Designed from scratch 'holistically', with affordable housing, employment, education, transport, open spaces and sustainable communities in mind, making it easy to live and work in. No site has yet been identified but The intention is to work with district councils and central government, provide assistance with planning, infrastructure and other things that are needed to make a garden town work.

Business Parks

SCC could provide land and infrastructure, help with access to funding and assistance with planning, getting key stakeholders together to encourage businesses to set-up, relocate and expand, creating jobs, ideally in skilled well-paid fields, to help the economy grow. It's too early to say where these might be located or the businesses they would support.

Energy Initiatives

SCC can provide support by making land available, helping access funding, and pushing for a government policy on tidal energy in the Severn Estuary. SCC wants to put Somerset at the heart of national discussions about energy initiatives, doing what they can to see them taken forward. Solar and tidal initially appear most likely.

Devolution

Discussions continue over the transfer of responsibility for some decisions and budgets to a more local level, enabling more decisions about Somerset being taken closer to Somerset.

23 authorities in Devon and Somerset have put proposals together called 'A Prospectus for Productivity'. For more info. visit www.somersetnewsroom.com/devolution/

The authorities involved include the county and district councils, Plymouth, Torbay, Exeter; as well as Exmoor & Dartmoor National Parks, and all three Clinical Commissioning Groups. Businesses are represented by the Hearth of the South West LEP (HotSW) and leads on economic growth and job creation.

The 'A Prospectus for Productivity' aims to address the region's big challenges:

- Relatively poor economic productivity compared to other parts of the country
- Lack of skilled workers especially in key areas such as health and social care
- An ageing population which puts growing pressure on our health and care services
- Need for better road, rail and air links; and improved broadband coverage

Public health

Public Health joined SCC several years ago and has a budget of £23m to encourage healthy lifestyles. Prevention work can avoid higher costs as people stay healthier, longer.

RACISM

SSDC councillors have unanimously supported the following and ask that local parish and town councils do the same.

'In the wake of the recent killing of Jo Cox MP and the less savoury rhetoric of some in the referendum campaign, this Council wishes to make it clear that we, the councillors, are proud to represent a vibrant and diverse community. We totally condemn any form of racism, intolerance, bigotry or xenophobia. Hate crimes have no place in our society and we will do all we can to prevent them. The residents of South Somerset, whatever their gender, race, creed, age, colour or sexual orientation are treated equally. We will not allow hate to become acceptable. We will work to ensure that local bodies and programmes have the support and resources they need to fight and prevent racism and xenophobia. We reassure all people living in this area that they are valued members of our community.'

Work has started with SARI (Stand Against Racism and Inequality), local migrant groups, charities and support groups to agree the help they require from the local councils in tackling hate crimes. A training session is to be set up to help understand the signs of hate crimes and put us in a better position to help tackle this unacceptable problem. In 2013 I independently undertook a formal Equality & Diversity qualification.

WASTE/RECYCLING

New recycling site measures to cut congestion, improve services and enhance safety begin on Monday 3 October. Almost all larger trucks and trailers will no longer have access. Those from nearby counties with vans or trailers, adding to Somerset council taxpayers' costs, will be told to use their own recycling sites. Commercial customers, currently limited to 10 paid-for waste sites, face further restrictions. A small proportion of residents bringing in household waste will need to apply online to get a free permit for their van, pick-up or trailer. The majority of residents bringing household waste in cars without trailers, including estates, 4x4s, people carriers and campervans, will need no permit and see no change. Permit applications are made online via SWP's website. Residents without online access can use any local library for online access and assistance. www.somersetwaste.gov.uk.

CHARD MUSEUM

The museum will be holding its Heritage Open Day on Saturday 10th Sept., from 1.30pm. Local groups are also encouraged to approach the museum for private visits and talks. Plans for next year include free WiFi access. The museum has granted a request for the transfer of artefacts to the renowned Henry Moore institute.

ADULT SAFEGUARDING

Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board, as part of its ongoing 'Thinking it, Report it' awareness-raising campaign, is actively encouraging local communities to sign up to a public pledge to stop the abuse of vulnerable adults. To find out more visit <http://ssab.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/pledge/> or contact ssab@somerset.gov.uk

UK YOUTH PARLIAMENT

Young people from fifteen Somerset schools and young people's groups took part in the UK's largest youth consultation this month. Members of Somerset's UK Youth Parliament – coordinated by SCC – have been encouraging schools and youth groups to commit to participate in the 'Make Your Mark' campaign. Its aim is to give young people across the UK a chance to vote on the issues that matter most to them. Votes will shape topics discussed and debated at the UK Youth Parliament House of Commons live debate in November.

YOUTH CLUB GRANTS

SCC has made grants totalling £30k to 11 youth clubs to help run popular sessions and support projects across the county. They have been matched by almost £19k in locally-raised funding and volunteer hours.

CORPORATE PARENT BOARD – There no meeting held this month.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY – There was no meeting this month.

Education Travel in Somerset Policy

As previously reported, this comes into effect from 01 Sept. 2016.

SOMERSET CHILDREN'S TRUST

Four county wide conferences are being held in Sept. for interested parties to find out how to: give support early, working with other agencies to provide joined-up care and support and offer a more child and family-centred approach. There will be representatives available to talk about a range of services and is aimed at professionals with roles supporting or working with children or young people.

ACTIVITIES/EVENTS ATTENDED

Compared with recent months, my activities this month have been significantly reduced, in part due to the summer holidays, meaning less frequent meetings, and also unexpected family commitments and illness.

2/8	Children Looked After roadshow – Shrubbery, Hotel, Ilminster
2/8	Cudworth Parish meeting
5/8	Charity Wine Tasting – Shrubbery
7/8	B'way Hill Methodist Church re-opening service
7/8	Donyatt Flower Show
10/8	Broadway - Neroche School community cohesion policy review
11/8	Ashill church coffee morning
11/8	Ilminster Fairtrade meeting
12/8	Horton VH – flower show (set up)
12/8	Whitelackington VH quiz
13/8	Langport Outdoor Flower Festival
13/8	Horton Flower Show
14/8	Community Church service Horton VH
14/8	Dowlish Wake BBQ
20/8	Donyatt Summer Fete
20/8	Planning site visits
22/8	SSDC – transformation update
24/8	Cudworth Summer Fete
24/8	Monk's Yard Community Day