

ILMINSTER DIVISION – SSSC/SCC COUNCILLOR REPORT MARCH 2016

COUNTY COUNCIL – There was no full council meeting this month.

Somerset is to welcome six refugee families in the next week or so, as part of the national Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme programme. Two of the families are to be re-settled in South Somerset. The scheme is fully-funded by the Government and families will be housed in the private rented sector, having no impact on housing waiting lists. Families will be resettled where the services, such as school places, health and social care, have the capacity to cater for them.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT GROUP

As a member of this cross party committee I attended the quarterly meeting which focused on the progress made, particularly in the area of IT. Concern has been raised over the lack of attendance at training sessions; higher take-up appears to be linked to access to service provision e.g. Small Improvement Scheme applications and Health & Wellbeing Grants.

SSDC – FULL COUNCIL – There has been no further progression in relation to the recruitment of the vacant CEO post.

Transformation Programme – agreement was reached to move forward with a new operating model to achieve savings whilst maintaining levels of service by merging front and back office activity. This will involve a move towards ‘digital by default’, with access to services including a self-serve element, and will involve some redundancies.

SSDC – AREA WEST – I was only able to attend part of this month’s meeting at which members received an update of SS2 planning policy, the slides from which have been forwarded to parish councils in Neroche ward.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES –

The second Quarterly Performance Review Meeting shows that SCC are on track to improve performance in this area.

A new Children and Young People’s Plan has been developed, focusing on continuous service improvement across all aspects of children services. The 9 priorities, which have shown progress in all areas, will be integrated to ensure continued progress with a central focus on improving the education, health and care outcomes for vulnerable children in Somerset.

Youth Justice System - An interim report has shown that across the county there is a significant drop in those coming into the system - now 100 active cases (down from 300), deemed to be in part due to a more flexible approach towards cautioning, although it was noted that the cases coming into the system are more complex. Somerset’s re-offending rates are amongst the lowest in the country and is moving towards integrated working with the Youth Offending Team for more targeted support.

Child Abuse – SCC has supported the “Together, we can tackle child abuse” national campaign raising awareness on how to report child abuse and to dispel misconceptions. In the SW 37% of the public are put off reporting because they think they might be wrong. Information is gained from many sources, such as teachers, GPs and the police; reports made by member of the public are just part of a bigger picture.

In 2014/15 Somerset, supported nearly 9,000 vulnerable children and young people.

For information visit www.somerset.gov.uk/sscbthresholds or call SCC on 0300 123 2224.

Child Sexual Exploitation - everyone has a part to play in preventing this, from taxi drivers and B&B owners, to teachers and GPs; understanding the signs and knowing what to do

when you see them is essential. Tailored awareness training is available and a CSE summit is planned for 11 April.

Somerset Star Volunteer Award – nominations are being sought for individuals and volunteer groups who go above and beyond in supporting youth activity. The closure date for nominations is Friday 29 April. The 'Star Volunteer' website is www.scvolunteering.com.

Education - Almost 91% of Somerset schools are now good or better, up from 82% - 19 still require improvement out of 257.

Concern has been received in connection with the recent government announcement that it will no longer be an OFSTED requirement for schools to have parent governors.

Neroche School has now increased its capacity to 7 classrooms (210 pupils) and has extended its formal catchment area.

School placement information from Liz Smith - SCC has a statutory responsibility to provide sufficient school places. Pupil Forecasts are produced annually using information provided by the health authority. Plans for new housing are also taken into consideration, once developments have received outline planning permission. In Ilminster at the end of Feb.

there were 351 dwellings at various stages of the planning process - 121 have been approved, 230 pending approval. SSDC trajectory data indicates that 131 of these will be built over the next 5 years. The remaining 220 are expected to be built after 2020.

In addition to this there are 605 dwellings in the pipeline for Ilminster, including an application for 400 dwellings at Canal Way, due for submission shortly. SSDC trajectory states that the first 100 at Canal Way will be built by 2020. The remaining 505 are expected to be built after 2020.

SCC's rule of thumb is that 210 new dwellings will produce a class of 30 First School pupils and 262 dwellings will produce a class of 30 Middle School pupils.

The dwellings above total 956 = an additional 5 classes of First School Pupils and 4 classes of middle school pupils.

SCC works with developers to secure additional school places that are a direct result of new housing. The LA understands that a site for a new school (expansion and re-location of Greenfylde?) has been identified as part of the application at Canal Way.

Virtual School - Zoe Heywood has been recruited from a similar role in Wiltshire to lead this, to cover the current officer's sick leave. School improvement and vulnerable learners' roles are to be separated. Narrowing the gap for Children Looked After - school block funding now goes directly to schools but SCC retains the pupil premium and SEN element.

CORPORATE PARENT BOARD – There are currently no care leavers in B&B accommodation. It is intended that compulsory Corp. Parent Training becomes part of SCC member induction. Plans are in place to produce a dedicated website to provide ready access for all. A bid has been put into Health England for emotion coaching.

The Corporate Parenting Board One Year Plan includes four Task and Finish Groups, Education, Health and Voice of the Child and Care Leavers (which I am involved in).

Somerset care leavers are behind their peers for those engaged in education, employment or training. It is intended that businesses seeking to tender for SCC contracts will be required to offer apprenticeships.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY- Children and families are a key theme in the new County Plan, recognising the need to provide information, early help and advice to enable families to help themselves. Key priorities are to improve - children's safeguarding, exam results, especially for the most vulnerable pupils, children's health and wellbeing.

Social Services - 40 new social workers have been recruited, average social worker caseloads have been reduced and use of locums has meant that the planned reduction in social worker case-loads, to 14 per worker, has been achieved, with a new focus on quality of practice. There has been some difficulty in recruiting Independent Reviewing Officers. Permanent staffing within children's services remains low at just 41%. The issue is common across the South West where it remains difficult to attract staff, especially in the Yeovil area, due to the lack of easy access to urban conurbations. 30,317 contacts with social services were made in 2015, with South Somerset having significantly higher levels of child protection and 'children in care' activity across the county. Of concern is the large part that the police play in these referrals, which result in just 15% requiring further action. Discussion is ongoing over the lack of police resources/training to adequately assess situations affecting children; with a recommendation to adopt 'best practice' from other authorities.

Clinical Commissioning Group – The reported underspend of £5m on dental is of concern given recent reports of the impact of a lack of dental care for children under 5.

DONYATT HALT – I have nothing further to report as yet, although several options are being considered as volunteers have come forward to help with fund raising and re-build etc. SCC have requested that proposals be put forward to consider what, if any, assistance might be provided.

COUNTY FARMS LAND – There have been several meetings between Donyatt and Ilminster Town Council to consider the best course of action to secure protection for the individual communities should development proposals be put forward.

HIGHWAYS – The closure of Station Road, Ilminster was completed ahead of schedule, much to the relief of local businesses.

GYPSY/TRAVELLERS – At the time of writing travellers at Peasmarsh had not complied with the court order for their removal from the site.

PLANNING

Planning activity across Neroche ward has been buoyant, with a number of applications being considered and concern raised by local residents over the implications of this.

YARLINGTON – Donyatt residents are awaiting clarification over the future plans for re-development of the Donyatt Hill site.

HASTOE – Horton parish councillors are to meet with the developers to ensure that planning conditions are complied with.

ILMINSTER EDUCATION FOUNDATION – The draft lease for the domestic science hut used by Greenfyld School has still not been received despite repeated requests.

VILLAGE AGENT - contact details for the new village agent for the Neroche parishes are – Audrey Mansfield - audrey@somersetccc.org.uk Tel: 01823 331222 Mob: 07870 577925 She is able to help with all manner of problems affecting local residents, including access to funds from a variety of sources.

BUSINESS RATES – several local businesses have requested that I follow up enquiries into the business rate relief scheme.

Meetings and Activities this month

1/3	Broadway PC
2/3	SCC – Liz Smith – Iminster school placement provision
2/3	SCC – Vikki Hearn/Tom Whitfield – P2i
3/3	Iminster Education Foundation
3/3	Iminster/Donyatt meeting re: County Land
4/3	SCC – Julia Ridge – Virtual School
4/3	Women’s World Day of Prayer supper
5/3	Bridgwater- Flood Warden training
7/3	SCIL – Safer recruitment training
7/3	Ashill PC
8/3	Iminster TC/Donyatt PC meeting re: County Land
9/3	SCC – Scrutiny
9/3	SCC - Dillington House
11/3	Hambridge School assembly
11/3	Claire Burgess – Local Government Assoc.
11/3	SCC – Corporate Parent Board
11/3	SCC – Tessa Bailey – Children’s Strategy
12/3	Horton Lent Lunch
13/3	Donyatt VH breakfast
13/3	Somerset in Care and Leaving Care Councils - Bridgwater
13/3	MAKE Theatre performance – Brewhouse
14/3	Neroche School governor meeting
14/3	Donyatt PC
15/3	Broadway VH quiz
16/3	SSDC Area West – Swanmead
17/3	SSDC – Licensing sub committee
17/3	Fiveways, Yeovil - School Improvement Group meeting
17/3	SSDC – full council
18/3	SCC – Scrutiny
18/3	Hestercombe exhibition preview
19/3	Earth Hour event Chard
20/3	Ashill Baptist Church
21/3	Horton PC
22/3	Octagon – DofE Awards
23/3	SCC – Member Development Committee
23/3	Chard Museum preview
24/3	Winsham School Easter service
24/3	Dowlish Wake PC
31/3	SCC – Children Looked After