

ILMINSTER DIVISION - COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT APRIL 2014

COUNTY COUNCIL ACTIVITY

Recruitment for the new CEO is due to take place week beginning 12th May, and I have been asked to participate in the selection process.

The sponsored abseil took place earlier this month, and so far over £8,000 has been raised. Cllr. Sam Crabb, has stood down as Leader of the Liberal Democrats, and has been replaced by Cllr. Jane Lock.

In the coming financial report an under spend of £22m. will be reported; this is as a result of monies coming from central government only being received on 31st March.

The contract with Webber Bus for the Taunton Park and Ride service was terminated at the end of April, due to under performance, with a new contractor due to be announced shortly. A visit by Minister Ed Vaizey, and a meeting held with members of the business community at Monk's Yard, to applaud Broadband roll out in the area, was not well received. There continues to be concern over the extent to which this will have a positive impact on Ilminster, with no confirmation of total coverage, largely for commercial reasons.

I have taken this up with county and understand that there are plans in place to overcome this by exploring local contracts.

FLOODING

Regular reports on the recovery process after the flooding on the levels continue to be received. Additional funding totalling £13m has been forthcoming from DEFRA with the intention for it to alleviate hardship specifically for those in the farming community.

There continues to be some localised flooding in Ilminster, which although not causing disruption, does need attention, and I have requested a meeting with highways and Town Council representatives to take place as soon as possible to ensure appropriate measures are put in place.

HIGHWAYS/TRANSPORT

As previously mentioned and reported in the local press, a petition was launched in relation to the continued closure of The Beacon. No end date has yet been forthcoming whilst the cause and solution of the subsidence continues to be investigated.

I am due to meet with residents from Kingstone and Dowlish over ongoing highways issues, and have been in touch with SSDC's planning dept. in relation to back roads to some of our villages being used by HGVs removing building site materials.

Residents have raised the issue of the poor provision of rural school transport, and its cost, particularly for those children travelling to secondary schools and academies. I am pursuing this on their behalf, and noted at Scrutiny that in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment South Somerset fares worst for accessibility to secondary school by public transport.

SID (Speed Indicator Device) results for the first two weeks in April show:-

Ilminster – average speed 31mph, with 38,339 recorded vehicle movements.

Broadway – average speed 37mph, with 8,440 recorded vehicle movements.

LOCAL PLAN

In relation to the SSDC local plan, in which the planned direction of growth for Ilminster continues to be a cause for concern and discussion, submission to the inspector, thought to be in June, is awaited.

At Donyatt, due to representations from a local resident, discussions have been held with county officers over the effect that any future growth will have on county farmland in the area.

ROYAL DEVON & EXETER NHS FT

My involvement continues, with a focus on exploring ways in which elected members such as myself can increase levels of engagement, to ensure that the local community have input into any decisions that affect them. I will be attending the Royal Devon Show on their behalf.

EDUCATION

The problem of providing free school meals for infants from this September, has largely been overcome, with the strategy intended to resolve the issue being finalised this month; it is thought this will involve a combination of external providers and funds used to upgrade existing facilities.

CHILDREN'S CENTRES

Cabinet decisions have now been finalised in relation to proposed changes to this service.

SOMERSET GOVERNORS' STRATEGY GROUP

Interviews for the new Executive Officer have now taken place, although the outcome is not yet certain. There continues to be a need for additional representation by governors on this group; the normal commitment is not onerous and it provides an opportunity for local input.

WILLOW SCHOOLS CO-OPERATIVE TRUST

I have nothing further to report here at present, with the next meeting due early in May.

SOMERSET in CARE COUNCIL

I joined the group for their residential weekend and can confirm that the 'giant swing' is much scarier than abseiling! £200k of funding has been invested with a view to actively gaining apprenticeship places for Children Looked After, who are reaching the stage where they will be assisted in moving on to independent living. The group now regularly participates as members of SCC's Corporate Parent meetings.

SOMERSET SKILLS AND LEARNING

I have nothing further to report on this at present, with the next meeting planned for early May.

SOMERSET RURAL YOUTH PROJECT

The appointment of the new board chair has now been carried out, with David Taylor (Ex SCC) due to take up this unpaid position in June. Concerns over funding for this coming financial year have largely been resolved. Although unable to attend the last board meeting, due to other work commitments I submitted a number of questions/comments for consideration and will report on the response next month.

SCC SCRUTINY

At this month's meeting the lack of achievement for Children Looked After was under consideration; in Somerset exclusion and absenteeism rates amongst this group are higher than the national average. Support funding has been increased to £1900 per child, which will no longer go straight to schools, as previously, but will be monitored by the newly appointed virtual head teacher who will continuously assess the impact.

There are now 9 members of the newly appointed Leaving Care Council, providing support and advice for those about to leave full time care.

In the news this week residents will have seen reports of the plan to pay foster carers a wage. A recruitment drive is underway to help improve placements and avoid the disruption that a lack of suitable permanent care can cause.

In the Corporate Monitoring Report for the quarter there has been a decline in performance in relation to working with partner organisations; it appears that this is due to ongoing negotiations over the formation of community libraries, which have yet to be finalised.

The Care Commissioning Group presented their two year plan, which forms part of a 5 year strategy with 4 key themes. Care in the community is to increase, along with a focus on projects to aid prevention of poor health. Plans for providing 7 day care across all health providers are underway. Health scores for the % of adults with depression and emergency hospital admissions for self-harm in Somerset are higher than the national average.