

**ILMINSTER DIVISION – SSDC/SCC COUNCILLOR REPORT DECEMBER 2014**

**COUNTY COUNCIL** – Interviews have now taken place and a formal announcement giving details of the new post holder for Director of Children’s Services is due this next week. Disappointment was expressed over the failure of some members to engage in the interview process for such an important post.

£2m. of the promised money from central government for flood alleviation schemes across the county has now been received.

An update meeting is planned this week in relation to South Somerset Adult Social Care services.

Queries have been raised over the sharp increase in FOI requests both from members of the public and also commercial organisations, where there is currently no mechanism to recoup the full cost recovery of providing such information.

I have agreed, reluctantly, to be part of a SCC trial for a new system to enable easier remote access to information.

Confirmation was received that all bids for capital funding this coming year will be able to be met.

Plans for the introduction of the central 0300 number are under way but as yet no final date for implementation is available.

**SCC SCRUTINY** – at the joint Policy & People/Places scrutiny meeting held this month a report was received on the expansion of ‘invest to save’ schemes to aid and encourage local residents and communities to become more self-sufficient in areas where services are being cut.

Issues over the provision of housing for the homeless were covered (a district not county statutory obligation) and a suggestion made to consider investing pension fund money in a ‘places for people’ scheme along the lines of that successfully implemented in Manchester. Concern was raised over the increasing move towards digital technology and the impact this would have for local residents without such access to services and key points of contact.

The corporate monitoring report showed that there is a downward trend and a failure to meet targets relating to vulnerable children and adults, which is unacceptable. However, there has now been an increase in the recruitment of the number of permanent social workers, and this is expected to expand further with the setting up of the Somerset Social Work Academy initiative.

Savings of £100k have been made through the initiative of joint traded services operated between Somerset & Devon, making it cost neutral. The successful ‘Approved Trader Scheme’, which won an award for tackling doorstep crime, is now being used by other authorities across the country.

**HIGHWAYS** – As promised, The Beacon (B3168) was re-opened in mid-December, although the timing of this was not universally welcomed where it is felt that delays in completing the work had been lengthy.

I was able to hand over a cheque for £7567.30 to Ilminster Town Council as a result of their successful bid for flood alleviation measures.

**Street Lighting** – an ongoing problem within Ilminster. I met with Mike Fear to discuss issues over the lack of response when reports of problems have been submitted. I would urge all local councillors to inform me immediately, or to pass on my contact details (at the bottom of this report) should there be issues arising, which I can then act on promptly; waiting until the usual meeting to raise issues can cause unnecessary delay.

Winsham have shown interest in taking advantage of the 'dark skies at night' initiative. At present there is to be no further funding for this but the situation will be reviewed this coming year.

**A303 upgrade** – fears over the impact of proposed works were raised by several environmental groups this month, which I have noted, and will raise with the appropriate cabinet member.

**Signage** – a number of damaged and/or missing signs have been observed in the area. Whilst parish/town councils may wish to pursue this with highways directly, it would be useful to be alerted when a timely response is not received (7 days?) so that I can follow up on their behalf.

**Drains** – I have been able to ensure that some work to blocked drains/gullies has been carried across the area this month. Please alert me if there continues to be outstanding issues.

**Winterhay Lane** – Local residents are becoming increasingly angry and frustrated at the lack of resolution over rights of way along this lane, and feel that the significant backlog of work (one of the impacts of continued spending cuts) that has caused the delay is unacceptable.

**SDDC** – The arrival of gypsy/travellers at Peasmarsh this month has given local cause for concern. Access was apparently obtained when the SCC owned site was left unsecured by contractors Skanska. I have expressed, in the strongest terms, on behalf of local residents, the high level of dissatisfaction at this situation, and am continuing to seek prompt action. This is however further complicated by SDDC's current lack of sites to accommodate them.

## **PLANNING**

**Broadway** – I have a meeting with planning officers at SDDC in relation to the proposed development in Broadway this next week.

**SDDC Local Plan** – The results of the final submission are due at any time.

**AREA WEST/SDDC FULL COUNCIL** – I was unable to attend either meeting this month due to other commitments within the division, but am satisfied that issues discussed, and decisions made, had little or no impact on Neroche Ward. In the case of District matters relating to Ilminster, the District councillors representing the town should be covering any items in their own reports.

**EDUCATION** – In a recent OFSTED report concerning the poor performance of secondary schools across the country, on this occasion Somerset was not singled out for criticism. Whilst those achieving a rating of 'good or above' remains slightly below the national average there has been an overall increase in ratings, closing the gap in line with expectations.

Pupil numbers at Neroche School have risen sharply and discussion/consultation is taking place over the possible provision of additional classes to accommodate.

All schools must now have a dedicated teacher for Children Looked After who is to take responsibility for outcomes where pupil premium is received.

**SOMERSET GOVERNORS' STRATEGY GROUP** – As reported last month, Helen Roper has now started her role as Executive Officer for Somerset Governors, and an early meeting with her is planned, along with other members of the Somerset Governors' Strategy Group.

**HEALTH** – I continue to be contacted on a regular basis by local residents over issues in relation to their care at local hospitals. Whilst there is acceptance that situations can vary, and that this can relate to individual cases, patients do need to be made fully aware that they have a legal right to choose where they go for treatment.  
On health grounds residents are being urged to give up alcohol for the month of January.

Several of the planned Red Cross first aid courses across the division have taken place, with excellent feedback on their usefulness having been received. Others are planned for the new year, and any other groups interested in taking advantage of these should contact Diane Bale for place/venue details on [d.bale1965@gmail.com](mailto:d.bale1965@gmail.com).

**CORPORATE PARENT BOARD** – The lack of involvement by County Councillors in this area of activity continues to be raised, despite a legal obligation towards young people in care. Placement stability remains a key area of focus, with evidence of a direct link to educational attainment.  
The setting up of a ‘virtual school’ is still in its early stages.

**ILMINSTER DIVISION – SSDC/SCC COUNCILLOR MEETINGS/ACTIVITIES DEC. 2014**

3	Winsham PC
5	Guildhall, Chard – Mayor’s fund raiser in aid of Chard Museum and others
6	Donyatt Christmas bazaar
	Rotary charity coffee fund raiser, Ilminster
	Whitelackington Christmas table top sale
	Horton Christmas Fair
	Neroche ward Christmas drinks
7	Wine tasting in aid of Winsham School
8	Neroche school governors’ meeting
	SCC – member Development Panel
	Meeting re: adult social care and vulnerable adults - Ilminster
10	Wadham school – practice interviews for year 11
	SSDC – Christmas meal
11	Broadway VH Christmas quiz
13	Charity wine tasting in aid of Somerset Rural Youth Project – Burnham-on-Sea
14	Donyatt breakfast
16	SCC – Joint scrutiny – Policy & People/Policy & Place
	SCC – Corporate Parent group
	Ilminster Town Council
18	Donyatt Carol Service
19	Meeting with Zoe Harris re: Heritage lottery funding
	Meeting with Mike Fear re: lighting and other highways issues
21	Somerset in Care Council – meeting at Bridgwater
	Broadway Carol Service
	Ashill Carol Service