

ILMINSTER DIVISION – SSDC/SCC COUNCILLOR REPORT FEBRUARY 2016

COUNTY COUNCIL – At this month’s full council a capital investment programme of £36m. was agreed. Last minute £2.9m additional funding from central government enabled additional funds to be put into highway gully and verge clearing, in addition to allowing depleted reserves to receive a boost.

After consultation, proposals to reduce to 25% the current 50% discretionary subsidy for free bus passes has been scrapped, at a cost of £70k.

I have received numerous emails lobbying for intervention against any future plans for fracking in the area.

A new healthy living service ‘ZING’ has been launched.

Agreement was reached at both SCC and SSDC to move forward with plans for devolution to form a combined authority.

The 'County Plan', outlining the 'vision' for Somerset was agreed.

Labour and Independent members have joined forces to form a new political group 'Independent Labour', having an impact on the political balance of some committees.

A rise of 1.9% to the SCC precept was agreed, taking into account the cost of the Somerset Rivers Authority and increased Adult Social Care requirements

Somerset remains the 3rd worst funded shire in the country.

SSDC – AREA WEST – A local housing needs survey has shown the following on the housing needs register in Neroche ward.

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	No. of bedrooms required
Ashill	-	1	-	1	1 x 4 bed.
Broadway	1	3	3	7	3 x 1 bed. 1 x 2 bed. 3 x 3 bed.

SSDC – FULL COUNCIL – Agreement was reached to increase the council tax precept by 1.95%. Taking into account rises by other precepting authorities the average rate for a Band D property for 2016/17 will now be £1,569.96, an overall increase of 4.55%.

Plans for joint authority working are no longer being pursued, as achieving the planned cost savings is unlikely. Interviews are underway for the recruitment of the vacant CEO post.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES – With senior management posts now filled, there is beginning to be evidence of positive outcomes in relation to OFSTED requirements. A new Children’s Plan has been developed, which will be ratified at the next full council meeting.

EDUCATION – I have a meeting planned for early March with Liz Smith to consider plans for future education in Ilminster as a result of the impact of upcoming development plans. Leaks in the roof at Neroche School, which it is felt have been caused by poor quality maintenance work, have caused the temporary closure of the school hall.

Julia Ridge has taken over control of the development of the ‘Virtual School’ to seek improved performance outcomes. I am planning to become involved in its management.

CORPORATE PARENT BOARD – There was no formal meeting this month but the 2016-2019 strategy has now been agreed, with a child friendly version still to be produced. Future meeting will focus on the priorities highlighted by the ‘in care’ and ‘leaving care’ councils, which I attend each month.

Agreement has been obtained for me to receive LGA training to strengthen my role.

Increased engagement with District councils/partners is required to ensure they meet responsibilities in relation to their Corporate Parent role e.g. providing free leisure passes.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY- 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. 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. Use of locums has meant that the planned reduction in social worker case-loads, to 14 per worker, has been achieved.

HEALTH & WELLBEING FUND – I was unable to accommodate late requests for funding but am continuing to assist with locating other funding sources for local organisations. Disappointingly, not all councillors used all of their allocation before the deadline.

DONYATT HALT – SCC have requested proposals from local residents in relation to the future of Donyatt Halt to consider whether or not some assistance might be provided. Ilminster residents are keen to be involved in providing volunteer/fund raising support.

COUNTY FARMS LAND – Clarification has now been received of the current position in relation to County Farms land in Ilminster and Donyatt. Discussions between the two communities are ongoing to consider proposed options for the future to be put forward

HIGHWAYS – A number of adverse comments have been received in relation to SCC Highways, particularly in relation to a lack of timely response to issues raised, and the brief period of advance notification of planned road closures, which I have passed on.

A303/A358 corridor - Highways England have held several public information events in relation to upgrading and improvement intensions, with further meetings planned.

Chaffcombe – plans for road closure were narrowly averted in response to concerns over the impact on a local haulage business, and the unsuitability of the proposed diversion.

Donyatt SIS – traffic calming proposals are to proceed to the next stage.

Ashill - (old A358) temporary road closure is in place to enable work to be carried out.

Station Road, Ilminster – Several meetings have been held in relation to the impact of the current closure and planned diversion routes, with evidence of the negative impact on local businesses already being felt.

Windwhistle/Cricket St. Thomas - SCC has issued notification of a temporary 30mph speed limit along this stretch of the A30, which is expected to be in place for up to 18 months to allow highways work to be completed.

GYPSY/TRAVELLERS – After some delay, the site at Peasmarsh, previously occupied by gypsy/travellers, has now been secured against future intrusion.

Current occupation of a site at Lydmarsh continues to cause concern. The situation is being closely monitored whilst appropriate action for removal is ongoing.

The government has recently amended the definition of gypsy/traveller to mean that they 'are expected to maintain some form of nomadic life'. I have made enquiries and can confirm that this will make no difference to recent appeal decisions.

Under the SSDC local plan there is a requirement for 23 pitches to be provided by 2028.

YARLINGTON – Concern has been raised by Donyatt residents over future garage occupancy in relation to the proposed plans for re-development of the Donyatt Hill site.

ILMINSTER PLANNING – In my capacity as District councillor for the adjoining parish, I attended a pre-planning meeting to discuss proposals for the Persimmon site at Canal Way.

BROADBAND – A social media workshop held as part of the Connecting Devon and Somerset initiative was well attended, providing useful information for local organisations.

SSDC SCRUTINY – I attended this month as substitute. Concerns have been raised over the financial impact of successful appeals for backdated business rate relief.

Car parking charges across the district are to remain unchanged for the coming year.

Somerset Waste Partnership - A change in the law from 2020 will prevent Local Authorities from charging for entry to re-cycling centres.

A charge is to be introduced for accepting asbestos.

A proposal has been put forward to restrict access for trailers at peak times w/e/f October.

Meetings and Activities this month

31/1	Horton Church Partnership joint service
31/1	Chillington Candlemas Service
1/2	SCC County Land - Charlie Field
1/2	Donyatt PC planning
1/2	Scrutiny Chair – Leigh Redman
2/2	SSDC - Scrutiny
2/2	Ilminster TC open meeting
2/2	Twinning Association AGM
3/2	Winsham PC
4/2	Ilminster TC meeting re: Station Road closure
5/2	Claire Burgess LGA re: Corporate Parent training
7/2	SiCC/SiCC meeting Bridgwater
8/2	SSDC – Community Co-ordinator work
8/2	Ilminster Lit. Fest.
9/2	SSDC – Andy Gunn - planning
9/2	SSDC – Social media workshop
9/2	SSDC – Enforcement team Yeovil Magistrate’s Court hearing
11/2	Carers’ Voice Somerset event – Hornsbury Mill
11/2	SSDC – Pre-planning application meeting - Persimmon
12/2	Ilminster TC – meeting with Charlie Field re: County Land
17/2	Director of Children’s Services re; Corporate Parent Board
17/2	SCC – full council meeting
17/2	SSDC – Area West Crewkerne
21/2	Horton – lent lunch
22/2	SCC – Julian Wooster re: Corporate Parent Strategy
23/2	Ilminster TC
24/2	SCC – Corporate Parent Agenda meeting
25/2	A303/A358 corridor briefing – Monk’s Yard
25/2	CCG – Board meeting Yeovil
25/2	SSDC – full council
26/2	SCC – Children & Families Scrutiny