

## ILMINSTER DIVISION – SSDC/SCC COUNCILLOR REPORT AUGUST 2015

**COUNTY COUNCIL** – August has been a quiet month as many committees have taken the opportunity for a summer break. As Sept. is likely to be busy I am conscious that I am not always able to make some planned meetings, usually due to a clash in timetables or my own work commitments. In an effort to try meet my obligations I have reduced my own working hours in order to try to accommodate where possible. As always, if there is any matter that requires my urgent attention or input then do not hesitate to contact me. This month there have been a number of areas in which some useful information relating to consultations and initiatives has been released, brief details of which follow.

Budget cuts remain a concern, and are likely to continue to affect the provision of some SCC services in the coming year, despite a significant increase in demand, resulting in a 15% increase in work load. In addition to a reduction of £20m in SCC Central Government funding over the last year (giving a 43% reduction in head count in the last two years), a further decrease of £42m. is estimated over the next five years. The SCC Leader chaired a meeting this month of representatives of local authorities across the SW to open discussions about devolution.

**SCC Health & Wellbeing Scheme** – Once again I have been allocated £5,000 to promote H&W in the division. It is intended that applications should be for amounts of £250 or more. One key change is the necessity for written permission to be granted for the use of any photographs taken in support of the monies received. The focus this year is on supporting **locally-led activity, through voluntary or community groups that encourage people to connect together, particularly those who find it hard to integrate into their local community.** I would urge those interested to submit applications at the earliest opportunity, preferably before the end of the year. Grants will now be paid by bank transfer to increase efficiency. I am due to attend a briefing session on 4<sup>th</sup> Sept., after which I will be in a better position to assist with applications. It is disappointing to note that this last year many councillors did not spend their allocation.

**Social Services** – The new SCC lead role in developing children's social care through its Step Up to Social Work programme across the SW has been praised by the Dept. of Education. Several assessment days have been held to recruit 8 trainees, who will qualify and be in place by 2017.

**School transport fares changes** – SCC has a duty to provide free transport for children attending their nearest or catchment school, if the distance between home and school is beyond the statutory walking distance. Eligibility for free transport applies if: the child is younger than 8, and attends their nearest or catchment school, which is over 2 miles from home; the child is aged 8 or above, attending their nearest or catchment school, which is over 3 miles from home. Parents who live within the required distance for eligibility are responsible for making their own transport arrangements and funding the costs of getting their children to school. This is also the case for parents whose children attend a preferred school, which is not their nearest or catchment school. Families who are not entitled to free transport can choose to pay for a spare seat, where available, at a charge which has traditionally been subsidised by the County Council.

A 12 week consultation period on proposed changes to the service has begun with families who pay for seats on school and college transport. SCC has put forward plans to increase the fares for 'Pay Seats' on school bus services, to bring them in line with fares paid by post-16 students, and those offered on public service transport. The new pricing structure is expected to be in place by Sept. 2016 for new customers and families purchasing an additional pay seat or a pay seat to a different school.

Those currently purchasing a pay seat service will continue to pay what they do at present – along with an expected yearly rise in inflation – until the child leaves their current school.

If the proposed changes are made, post-16 students would be able to purchase a County Ticket, giving access to buses on both school and public bus networks. The reduced access Student Contract Ticket would no longer be available. [www.somerset.gov.uk/have-your-say/consultations](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/have-your-say/consultations)



**HIGHWAYS****Small Improvements Scheme (SIS) –**

SCC's SIS is to be re-launched this autumn with some important changes, intended to provide more frequent opportunities for Members to be able to submit up to 2 schemes for consideration, whilst allowing the programme to be more efficiently managed and implemented. I am due to attend a briefing at the end of Sept., a requirement before any new schemes can be submitted.

**Key Objectives** - Better assistance and information from scheme inception to delivery to ensure greater certainty of programme delivery and clearer management of expectations, ensuring value for money and delivering strategic objectives

**Key Changes** -

- 1) Up to three opportunities for scheme submission per year starting Oct. 2015.
- 2) Clearer process for scheme progression into the programme.
- 3) Introduction of a score-card mechanism, with Member input.
- 4) A Members' Charter clarifying roles and responsibilities throughout the process.
- 5) Clearly identified communication channels with officer leads for each scheme.
- 6) A new website 'Somerset Traffic Choices' is to be launched in Sept. to give Members and the public greater help and assistance in identifying the most appropriate potential schemes to address community concerns.

**Horton – Five Dials** - I have had confirmation that the approved scheme at Five Dials is currently in Design and progressing well with view to the consultation plans being issued to at the beginning of Nov. 2015, and I am due to discuss consideration of a 40 mph speed limit with Colin Fletcher this week, in the absence of Gary Warren, who has broken his leg.

**Donyatt – Traffic Calming** – There continues to be discussion with highways over recent SID readings and the concerns of local residents about both the volume and speed of traffic.

**Parking** – All future proposals for residents' parking schemes have been suspended while a new policy is being implemented.

**Unadopted land** – Increasingly I am being contacted by local residents over concerns in relation to maintenance of what appear to be un-adopted sections of road/footpaths in the division, where neither SCC or SSDC have a statutory responsibility for maintenance or repair but there is the expectation that the situation be dealt with where there are safety concerns for local residents.

**Drainage, Ilminster – Tesco Store** – Following this item in my report last month I have heard nothing further in relation to comments made by the Flood Risk Management (FRM) team, and the option of the Town Council applying for Flood Mitigation Money from SCC, dependent on permission from the landowners.

**Ditton Street** – I have no further news to report on the bid submitted by the FRM team for funding from the Somerset Rivers Authority for a survey to be carried out as part of the 5 year programme for CCTV surveys of privately-owned systems.

**RIGHTS OF WAY – Winterhay Lane** – Disappointingly there continues to be no further news.

**PLANNING –**

There has been a good deal of recent activity in the four villages that make up Neroche ward, where it is encouraging that those involved are actively seeking to find amicable solutions to best suit community needs.

**Gypsy/Travellers** – I am awaiting news of the impending court date for action to be taken against occupants of the Peasmarsh site. The situation is complicated by the presence of children. Local residents have raised concerns over litter and the presence of dogs on the site which affects access for walkers, and their comments are to be added to the court submission.

**A303** – The frequency of fatal accidents along the A303 continues to make headlines and there is acknowledgement that options to mitigate this need to be considered as a matter of urgency.

**SCC CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY** – A workshop is due to be held this coming month (delayed from Aug.) to re-vamp the Corporate Parent Board and encourage councillors to engage. The focus for Sept.'s meeting will be the 9 key priorities identified, which are intended to ensure delivery of improved standards to satisfy OFSTED by May next year. Early feedback from Essex, who are working with SCC, is that we are on track.

A 'Leaving Care' task and finish group is being set up, which I have been asked to Chair.

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES** - I have received an enquiry from a local resident in relation to the salary paid for an interim appointment to children's services at SCC; the cabinet member is responding.

**SOMERSET IN CARE COUNCIL** – This month I provided support for two youngsters and a new apprentice to the In Care Council team in gaining their Level 2 Award in Food Hygiene, and have plans to put together team to support these youngsters in achieving their DofE bronze award; volunteers to assist with this would be welcome, and appropriate training provided.

**EDUCATION – Neroche School** – A seventh classroom is to be opened this term to accommodate an increase in pupil numbers, and confirmation has been received of an increase in the school's catchment area.

**Broadband roll-out** – I have no further information to report this month.

#### Meetings and Activities this month

2/8	Donyatt Flower and Vegetable Show
8/8	Horton Flower Show
9/8	Donyatt VH Breakfast
9/8	Horton Combined Worship Service
12/8	SCC Scrutiny agenda meeting
24/8	SCC – Food Hygiene Level 2 – support for Children Looked After

