

County Councillor's Brief for Town & Parish Councils



South Petherton and Islemoor Division
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Massive boost for Somerset's economy – Hinkley Point

Somerset County Council, the Government and energy provider EDF have reached commercial agreement on the key terms of a proposed investment contract that brings the prospect of a new nuclear reactor at Hinkley Point a big step closer.

"This is a huge step forward on what has been a very long road towards the development of Hinkley Point C. Somerset is at the forefront of the UK's new generation of nuclear development and the proposed Hinkley Point C nuclear power station is an extremely important opportunity for our County. The proposed development could eventually generate 7% of the nation's energy needs over the next 60 years as well as provide major benefits for Somerset, including:

25,000 jobs will be created over the construction period, 5,600 construction jobs plus 1000's of supply chain jobs; £128m is to be made available for community benefit projects over 40 years once the plant is operational; Investment in housing, education and transport; £100million per year will be put into the regional economy during peak construction; £40million per year will go into the regional economy, reaching more than £2bn over the lifetime of the project; 900 permanent workers will be required when Hinkley Point C is operational and 400 new apprenticeships will be created.

Children in the care of the County Council

One of my roles at the County Council is as a Corporate Parent. It is a very interesting and responsible function that we exercise through the Corporate Parent Group. Not many know the Somerset Council Council has responsibility for 527 Children Looked After (CLA). This is a 19% increase since 2010 and above the national average (12%). There are a further 366 with a Child Protection Plan (CPP). The role of SCC includes care, health, education and preparing the children for adulthood. Child care is subject to OFSTED inspection, a new improvement framework comes effective in November; it includes the completion of Health Assessments on each child and the running and supervision of 8 SCC residential homes and a number of wonderful people who foster this vulnerable group. At our meeting on 29th October we were analysing a Parenting Strategy. We aim to enable all children and young adults to achieve their full potential. Above all every child should be safe and protected, make healthy choices, have the opportunity to live active lives, enjoy and do well at school, achieving their potential academically and be confident about their plans and be on a path to a secure and independent future.

The interim Director, Peter Lewis, continues to firm up plans for addressing issues raised at the recent OFSTED inspection, and has in place a team of senior managers to move this forward. Peter's practical, pragmatic approach, and his experience in supporting LA improvement measures is expected to have a significant impact on improvement.

The Somerset in Care Council organised a weekend at 'Parents Get Lost' outdoor activity centre in Weymouth, with 11 youngsters. This was a great opportunity to get more involved, to understand the challenges faced, and to look at ways in which SCC can make more of a positive impact. Further residential trips are planned. Efforts are now being made to decrease exclusions and increase attendance for looked after children.

RNAS Yeovilton - A Secure and Growing future

A briefing was held for the local community 24th October at which we learned of the developments at the Royal Naval Air Station at Yeovilton. Next year sees the start of a build-up of a new Army Aviation capability when the 1 Army Air Corps Regiment, 595 personnel and flying the new Westland's Wildcat helicopter starts to arrive to integrate with their Royal Navy, Commando Aviation and Royal Air Force colleagues. This phased programme will be completed in 2017. Yeovilton will then be the major centre for aviation and one of the largest military bases in the South West. Together with the civilian aviation engineering and other contractors, civil servants and military personnel Yeovilton will be employing around 5000. They and their families make a significant economic contribution to the county of Somerset. The current Married Quarter sites will be augmented with two new sites in Yeovil and Wincanton where preparations are in hand to provide all the services and facilities for these welcome new arrivals into our communities.

Sheltered Housing support consultation

Somerset's public is being invited to have its say on proposed changes to the County Council's support for tenants in Sheltered Housing. A consultation starts 25 October and ends 6 December. All the County's sheltered housing tenants – roughly 7,000 - are being contacted to seek their views as are the wider public. The wider public can also have its say on the proposals that would mean only those tenants with the greatest needs would receive support paid for by the Council. Anyone wishing to give their views on the proposals can Call 01823 359333 or email: shelteredhousing@somerset.gov.uk or complete an online survey at: www.somerset.gov.uk/supportinshelteredhousing.

A Sheltered Housing scheme is a group of bungalows or flats, mostly for older people, that have some shared facilities and an alarm system to summon help in emergencies. Landlords provide maintenance and management, and the cost of this and the alarms is covered by rent fees. The support being consulted on covers a range of tasks provided by staff for tenants – such as helping people to pay bills, arrange appointments, plan meals or shopping. The Council funds, through contracts with landlords, this support for those whose level of need makes them eligible. The current contract supports around 3,500 people. A similar number of people in Sheltered Housing receive the support but pay for it themselves.

Main proposals, which would reduce the Council's annual funding to Sheltered Housing by £500,000 to £1m, include:

- Continuing to restrict support to people in Sheltered Housing schemes – not extending it to people in other types of housing.
- Providing support only to people with higher support needs, needs that make it difficult for them to remain in the flat or bungalow.
- Focus support on helping people develop ways of coping on their own.
- Only provide support where the person cannot pay for it themselves or have it provided by someone else, for example a family member.

Some One Liners

Community Payback - Supervised teams of young offenders continue to work locally, although co-ordination of location and activities requires more input to ensure focus. There have however been enquiries from other areas for this work to be rolled out to them.

Highways - Cabinet member for Highways and Transport, Harvey Siggs, has recommended the adoption of the Local Transport Implementation Plan, which will go to full council next month, having taken into account Scrutiny recommendations. A funding split for the 2013/14 Capital Programme, has been agreed, where the small improvement schemes allocation is £2.7m and Maintenance £16.849m from an overall highways capital budget of £19.549m. Improvements along the A30/A303 and A358 form part of the plan. Key themes are around 'Investing in Our Future', 'Caring and Protecting' and 'Keeping Costs Down'. The full document is available on the SCC website.

Somerset Business Awards - the Somerset Rural Youth Project was selected as Charity of the Year at the Somerset Business Awards. I want to ensure our local communities are aware of the opportunities are available to young people, especially in relation to the mobile youth club bus, and moped loan scheme.

Childrens Centres - Consultation on the future of Children's Centres has been extended into the New Year. It is expected there will be changes as a result, with more emphasis on frontline services and increased provision in rural areas. SCC is the top performing LA in the SW for the provision of 2 year old places.

Adult Care - A meeting has now been arranged for the end of November/early December with parents/carers and service users to allow the opportunity for discussion with officers to enable a greater understanding of issue that have been ongoing for sometime.

SCC Leaders Road Show - 6000 people have so far contributed to the 'Listening, Learning and Changing' events across the County. John Osman has been invited to South Petherton, Date to be confirmed.