

County Councillor's Brief for Town & Parish Councils



South Petherton and Islemoor Division

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- **Full Council agrees ambitious plans for the future.** The February full Council approved an ambitious vision for the county plan and ground-breaking plans for devolution. To see the documents:
- <http://www1.somerset.gov.uk/county-plan/County%20Plan%20high%20res%2012.01.16.pdf>
- <https://somersetnewsroom.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/hotsw-devolution-prospectus-2016.pdf>
- **County Plan 2016-19.** The vast majority of councillors agreed that the vision for Somerset is excellent news for the county. The vision looks to put the authority at the heart of work to create a Somerset University, new business parks, a 'garden town' and new energy initiatives. Councillors also agreed to support the devolution plan that aims to maximise investment and boost productivity in the south west. The plan aims to create better-paid jobs, improved road, rail and broadband links and more homes for the region's growing population. "The devolution plan and the vision are ambitious, but they are also vital to the future of the county. We need a university to keep young people in Somerset, we need a garden town to provide much needed homes and we need business parks and energy initiatives to boost our local economy and create jobs."
- **Budget 2016-17.** Full Council also agreed budget proposals for 2016/17 that set around £8m of savings and capital investment of £75m in roads, schools and economic development. As well as an increase in Council Tax – 2 % ring-fenced for Adult Social Care, 1.99% for other essential services and a further 1.25 % on behalf of the Somerset Rivers Authority to help fund its vital flood protection work. Cllr Osman continued: "Balancing the budget has not been an easy task and we have had to make some really difficult decisions. We've had to prioritise the essentials and propose a number of savings that we prefer not to have taken. "Last week we received an extra £2.9m from government. We are thankful for this money, which we will invest in key front line services, highways and to replenish our decreasing reserves, but it is not enough. We will continue to campaign government for fairer funding for our county."
- **Budget pressures continue.** There is increasing, on-going pressure on the Council's budget due to dramatic reductions in Central Government funding and heightened

demand for its core, vital services. We also not forget there is still a large amount of loans taken out by the previous administration that continues to cost SCC over £30 million each year in interest payments. The review of the discretionary Bus Pass Policy is part of the Council's efforts to find efficiencies and savings to help it bridge its funding gap. "Balancing this year's budget has been incredibly hard, but I am glad we have been able to respond to the public concern on this subject.

- **Launch of new Threshold guidance called "Effective support for children and families in Somerset", aims to embed Early Help.** The Somerset Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) is today launching new guidance for professionals and managers to make sure help is available for children, young people and families as soon as it's needed. The guidance aims to further establish the principles of Early Help for all those who support children, young people and their families in the County. Early Help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges within a family, and is far more effective than reacting later. Embedding Early Help is one of the nine priorities for improving Children's Services in Somerset.
- **Fancy Fostering to Adopt?** www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk People eager to give a young child a loving and stable family life are being urged to drop in for a cuppa on Thursday 25 February, 7pm to 9pm, Costa Yeovil, Middle Street, BA20 1LE this February. Somerset County Council is specifically seeking people who want to embrace its rewarding Fostering to Adopt initiative for children aged 0 to 4 and older. Fostering to Adopt places a child with a family who have been approved as adopters, and who are given approval temporarily as foster carers for that specific child. This is a positive option for the child, who will live with their likely adoptive family from a young age. To date, 12 children have been successfully placed through Fostering to Adopt in Somerset.
- **Council listens to the public on community travel changes.** Proposals to reduce a discretionary subsidy for free bus pass holders using community transport have been changed following a public consultation. Following residents' feedback, the Council has decided to scrap a proposed drop in its 50 per cent discretionary subsidy for free bus pass users who use community transport, by looking to its reserves. It had been proposed that the subsidy would fall to 25 per cent. The decision to revisit the proposals means that what was a £110,000 saving is now £30,000. Other proposed changes to the Council's discretionary policy for concessionary bus pass holders will still be put to Cabinet vote on Monday 8 February 2016, and, if approved, to Full Council later in February.
- **Somerset social workers honoured at award ceremony.** Two Children's Social Care workers from Somerset have been honoured for their outstanding work with children and young people in the county. A video interview with Gregg and Linda is available to view here: <https://youtu.be/C526qkLrHWc> . Somerset County Council is currently recruiting social workers as part of ambitious plans to improve Children's Gregg Liddington, a Social Worker based in Taunton and Linda Ettey, a Leaving Care Worker based in Bridgwater, were both presented with the Children's Social Worker of the Year award last week (Friday 29 January) at the Somerset County Council Staff Awards. Gregg and Linda each received nominations from a number of children and young people that they work with. Each nomination described why they deserved to be recognised for their hard work and dedication. In total, the Staff Awards Team received over 60 nominations from children and young people who all wanted their key worker to receive recognition for the incredible work they do. Four of the other nominees were Highly Commended for their contribution to Children's Social Care at the award ceremony. Social Workers Maggie Docherty, Charlotte Jeffery and Sarah Phillips and Leaving Care Worker Pam Walters all received numerous nominations from the children and young people they work with.
- **New build homes to have superfast broadband connectivity** The new deal will see fibre based broadband offered to all new developments either for free or as part of a co-funded initiative. It is estimated that more than half of all new build properties can be connected to fibre broadband free of charge to developers. As part of the agreement, Openreach is introducing an online planning tool for homebuilders. This will tell them whether properties in a given development can be connected to fibre for free, or if a contribution is needed from the developer to jointly fund the deployment of the local fibre network. From today, the housing industry will have access to a 'rate card' from

Openreach which details the fixed cost contributions required by homebuilders in those cases where joint funding is required. Openreach will make a significant contribution itself before seeking any funds from developers. The Home Builders Federation will promote and support uptake of the co-funding offer amongst their members, and emphasise the need to plan for connectivity early in the development. This new offer sets a high bar for all suppliers and developers in the market, and Government will be working with industry closely to monitor success over the next year. Digital Economy Minister Ed Vaizey said: The Government's ambition to build 1 million new homes over the course of this Parliament will house families and future generations to come. Broadband connectivity is just one thing that home buyers now expect when buying a new build, so this industry-led push to make superfast, or indeed ultrafast, broadband speeds available by default in new homes represents a very important step in meeting the UK's digital needs.

- SCC welcomes progress with A303/A358 improvement plans. Somerset County Council's Highways head has welcomed progress with improvement plans for a major arterial route that will drive economic growth and prosperity in the South West.** Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, David Fothergill, is urging residents to attend three Somerset-based events on the future upgrade of the A303/A358 corridor. Prime Minister David Cameron announced significant upgrades to the route, linking London and the South East to the South West, as part of the Government's Roads Investment Strategy in winter 2014. "This project is a vital key to unlocking the future growth and prosperity of Somerset and the South West. We all know that, as well as drastically improving driver experience, it represents fantastic opportunities for our county – from generating well over 20,000 jobs, to bringing a £42bn benefit to our region's economy over 60 years. "It has taken many years of hard lobbying by a Somerset-led partnership of local authorities to reach this point. I am pleased that we are now all being given this chance to find out more and eventually share our views, paving the way for the improvements." Highways England's public engagement days provided some initial information on how plans for the A303/A358 corridor will be developed. These encompass three schemes to dual the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down, the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester, and the A358 Southfields to Junction 25 (Taunton) of the M5.
- Update on Hospital Roundabout improvements - Major work to improve the Hospital Roundabout in Yeovil is progressing well and moving into the next phase of development.** The Hospital Roundabout scheme is one part of a £14 million programme of works by Somerset County Council to improve roads along the Eastern and Western Corridors of the town. As well as increasing the capacity of major junctions and improving traffic flow, the two schemes are essential to support Yeovil's economic growth and are necessary to allow major developments to go ahead, including: More than 2,000 new homes at sites in Brimsmore, Lufton and Lyde Road; more than 20ha of employment land at Lufton and Bunford Park; and redevelopment of the town centre including the cattle market. The work will see dedicated left turn lanes installed on the Queensway, Kingston and Reckleford approaches. The width of the carriageway through the roundabout will also be reduced to two lanes to help improve safety and prevent unnecessary delays to traffic. Work began on 1 February and has progressed well with site clearance and kerbing now complete to the central islands on the approaches. Phase two will see work on the nearside lanes and slip roads along Queensway, Kingston and Reckleford. Efforts have been made to keep all the major roads open at all times, although it will be necessary to close some lanes to allow the work to be carried out safely. Phase two will see the carriageway around the roundabout reduced from two lanes to one, which is likely to increase congestion in the area. Unfortunately this next phase is likely to be more disruptive, so please bear this in mind and allow extra time if travelling in the area over the next few weeks.
- Please note:** Other road improvements are planned in future to the junction of Lyde Road and Sherborne Road. This is a developer-led scheme and has been on our forward programme for some time. In the absence of any confirmed start dates from the developer, the go ahead was given for the other schemes. When we receive confirmation from the developer of their intentions we will carefully consider the availability of road space on the network and advise them accordingly to keep any disruption to the travelling public to a minimum.

- **“He’s the most amazing little boy” Fostering to Adopt Story. See more details on www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk** A Somerset couple who went on to adopt the baby they were fostering want to do it a second time. Jayne and David were the first to embrace Somerset County Council’s vital Fostering to Adopt initiative, and now live happily with their adopted son Ben*. Twelve children have been successfully placed through Fostering to Adopt in Somerset to date. Fostering to Adopt gives young children who come into care greater stability in their early life, by placing them with adopters who have been specifically approved as their foster carers. This is a positive option for the child, who will live with their likely adoptive family from a young age, and be able to form attachments.
- **Mobile Libraries - Use it or lose it.** When we held the Library Services Review in March last year, we advised you that we would be reviewing all Mobile Library stops on an annual basis and where usage falls below the criteria we have set, we may have to discuss with you the need to withdraw the service. The criteria are: Withdrawing stops if unused for 3 consecutive visits or Withdrawing stops if there are less than 3 regular users
- **ZING – new healthy living service for Somerset. Healthy eating, Healthy physique, Healthy weight. <http://www.zingsomerset.co.uk/>** A contract to deliver the Council’s healthy weight, physical activity and healthy eating service has been awarded to Somerset Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP) and Somerset Community Food (SCF). The new service will mean Somerset’s residents can access the expert advice of a healthy lifestyle team, including health trainers, active lifestyle officers and children and families workers. Intense support will be available for some individuals and families. SASP will provide advice and information on physical activity while Somerset Community Food will provide healthy eating advice and Somerset Partnership NHS Foundation Trust will provide weight management services as well as support for other lifestyle issues.
- **Latest on Yeovil primary schools - Somerset County Council is continuing to plan for two new primary schools in Yeovil to meet the town’s growing demand for spaces.** The necessary primary places will be available from September 2016, with funding in place for the schools in Lufton and Wyndham Park, along with two enthusiastic sponsors - Preston Primary Academy Trust and Huish Primary Academy Trust. The original intention had been to open them in their own permanent buildings in September 2016 but planning and access issues have delayed the projects. Interim arrangements at Huish Primary have been made to provide spaces until the buildings are complete.

The County Council is planning to build a seven classroom school on land within Wyndham Park so that school places are available there for the start of the 2017 academic year. There will be scope to build another seven classrooms on adjacent land if the Primrose Lane housing development is progressed. Initially the Council had submitted plans for a seven classroom school and the ability to extend to 14 classrooms on a site in the Primrose Lane development. However, uncertainties around planning consents meant it would not be able to deliver the school in time for the 2017 academic year and there was no certainty of a delivery date.

“We are committed to having the school places Yeovil needs, when they are needed,” said Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

“We have arrangements to make sure there are places available in September 2016 and are progressing the school building projects as quickly as we can. We are well aware that if the housing development on Primrose Lane progresses, more places will be needed at Wyndham Park and that is why we would be submitting plans for another seven classrooms if the development gets the go ahead.”

The planning application for the Lufton School was submitted before Christmas. The current expected latest completion date is February 2018, however, the County Council remains hopeful that there may be scope to bring this date forward. Cllr Nicholson added: “We are doing our very best to move these school builds along as soon as possible and the difficulty is getting access to the right sites in the right places at the right time.” In the interim both sponsors have agreed to host the new schools on the Huish Primary School site. This will deliver up to 60 places for reception 2016. The classrooms will be of permanent modular construction and transitional transport will be provided for the duration of the hosting arrangements.