

## **SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCILLOR UPDATE**

**20<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2021**

**Face-to face meetings to resume:** From the 21<sup>st</sup> June the majority of SCC council meetings will require members of committees to attend in person so they can take part in voting. For the last 14 months all meetings have been held through MS Teams. It's worked very well, and it enabled more councillors and members of the public to join the meetings, without the need to travel. It is a shame that the option for online meetings is not able to continue for those who would like to observe and participate in meetings but are not involved in a vote.

**Highways:** There is still the outstanding issues of yellow lining and extending the 20-mph speed limit on Tellisford Lane and Frome Road. Both of which are supported by residents. The police will also be able to enforce on Frome Road if the speed limit was moved further back from where it is now.

The long-awaited TAG minutes from a meeting some time ago is frustrating for residents who have strong views on the known outcomes of the discussions had on yellow lining and the extension of speed limits. Despite the April PC minutes referring to the fact this would be on the June agenda it is not. The agenda item refers to a TAG report under the Council reports agenda item.

The concern is that members of the public have not seen a report and will be unable to speak in the public session on it without advanced sight of the report. I too am unable to comment further at the PC meeting without sight of a report.

I have written to the PC and Rex Eastment requesting a public meeting to discuss all the proposals before the PC makes any decisions. In the meantime, the concerns raised by residents remain unaddressed and the agreed changes to support the school crossing have not been taken forward.

There is also the opportunity I shared with the PC in respect of the small area of SCC land at the mouth of Town End. With permission the PC would be able to plant in the verge or put planters on it. This would prevent parking on this area and on top of a BT facility. At the same time, it will enhance this key gateway to the village. At the moment the grass on the verge is almost worn away, the wooden bollard is damaged yet again. Please can an agreement be reached on this matter.

**Church Mead-Dog Fouling:** I have provided numerous pieces of information both to the PC and the chair of Church Mead Committee. None have been responded to. There is clear confirmation from MDC and SCC relating to the CMC proposals for a dog on lead policy. Based on the information available at the time the opinion is that this is not something that can be done.

There is an agenda item for this matter and once again there is no update or report available for consideration prior to the meeting. Members of the public and I will once again be unable to speak in the public session on this without full knowledge of the contents of any report or update.

## COVID 19

**Lateral Flow tests:** Rapid lateral flow tests are available to everyone for free and the advice is that they should be carried out twice a week (every 3 to 4 days).

It is estimated that 1 in 3 people have Covid-19 but do not have symptoms-rapid testing helps to identify those so they can self- isolate and 'stop the spread'.

Find out how to get a lateral flow test:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/covid-19-lateral-flow-test/>

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**Vaccination Programme:** Somerset is performing very strongly in the vaccination rollout. The programme has been extended again with everyone over the age of 18 able to be vaccinated. There are now walk in sessions at the local vaccination centres. please keep your eyes on the local media sites for details. Tests for the over 18-year-olds can now be booked at the nearest centre at the moment is the Bath & West Showground. The test can be booked from the [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) website.

Over 25's without internet access can phone 119 to book an appointment.

In the last week 75291 people were tested in Somerset. Of those tests 117 were positive. Slightly up on the previous week.

The latest data for Somerset **as of 18<sup>th</sup> June** shows the infection rate for Somerset is now 20.8/100,000. The figure for Mendip was 4.3 per 100,000 last week and the County figure was 10.1. This week the figures have increased for Mendip to 14.7/100,000. All Districts have infection rates between 10 and 30 per 100,000 but they numbers are rising.

**Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline:** A single phone number continues to be available for anyone in Somerset who needs Coronavirus-related support. **0300 790 6275**, is open seven days a week from 8am to 6pm.

**One Somerset:** The official government consultation is closed and the announcement on the future of local government in Somerset is expected from the Government in late June/ early July If you want to learn more about what will happen next or learn more about the consultative groups that are being set up to help shape the future of public services in Somerset. visit: [www.onesomerset.org.uk/whats-next/](http://www.onesomerset.org.uk/whats-next/)

You will be aware of the ‘poll’ undertaken by the four District Councils. SCC had no involvement in the poll, or any materials produced. There was a significant error in the information sent out to over 435,000 electors who were invited to vote. Instead of pointing voters to the official One Somerset website the information pointed voters to a website masquerading as One Somerset, which contained defamatory content.

The reasons SCC did not partake in the poll were that it did not comply with the official Secretary of State consultation and he warned against this course of action. He also had grave concerns about the implications of the unofficial website link in the poll literature.

**Extra investment into Public Health:** Somerset County Council is allocating an additional £10m to embed public health across all areas of council services. The major investment will include £2m to support Somerset communities – helping address anxiety and those with mild mental health issues. £2m expanding Somerset’s expert health protection programme including controlling outbreaks, managing testing, providing localised contact tracing, and supporting businesses and communities. Some funding will be invested in research and work to improve local understanding of Covid and the changing needs of the Somerset. A further £500,000 will be made available for town and parish councils to help them reconnect with their communities by safely reopening facilities like halls, rooms and other sites with good prevention control measures in place.

**Summer activities for Years 11:** Somerset students heading from Year 11 into Year 12 will have access to a wide range of free exciting educational opportunities this summer. There is a mixture of virtual and face-to-face events and activities to choose from taking place across the county including Kilver Court, Charterhouse, and other key venues across Somerset. These will include team-building exercises and physical activities such as climbing and low-ropes, as well as wellbeing and ‘ready to study’ sessions. Registration is now live via: [www.somersetworks.vfairs.com](http://www.somersetworks.vfairs.com)

**Rights of Way:** During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a big rise in the number of people using the county’s 9,000 public rights of way across the network which totals 3,843 miles (6,186 km). This has meant a huge upsurge in the number of reports being received; at times double that from previous years. Through the Rights of Way team and nearly 400 volunteers the network’s ‘easy to use’ grading has risen to 85.7%, the highest since records began in 2003 when the percentage was just 39.2%. For anyone interested in helping the team you can find out more about at [www.volunteering.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.volunteering.somerset.gov.uk)

**New School for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities:** Construction has finished on Polden Bower School, a brand new £23m Somerset County Council-funded state-of-the-art school in Bridgwater which is clearly visible from the M5. The project is part of a wider SCC’s programme to boost provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) in the county and caters for 160 students aged 4-16 with complex needs. Primary aged children are due to start on site in June, with older children following in July so that they get the accustomed to their new environment before the start of the new school year in September 2021.

**Winter Gritting Summary:** In the 2020/21 winter season SCC's fleet of 23 gritters were needed on 66 occasions when freezing temperatures were forecast, treating around 900 miles of road each time to help prevent ice forming. This included additional gritting to ensure safe passage to vaccination and testing sites. The team covered 70,200 miles, a significant increase from previous years when they covered 44,000 miles in 2019/20 and 32,800 miles in 2018/19. The lowest road temperature was recorded at -6.1 degrees in the Mendip Hills on 10th February 2020.

Cllr. Linda Oliver,

Frome North Division

20<sup>th</sup> June 2021