

County Councillor's Brief for Town & Parish Councils



South Petherton and Islemoor Division

February 2017

Christopher Le Hardy

CLeHardy@somerset.gov.uk

0780-389-4992

Fb:

www.facebook.com/christopherlehardy/

| |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You will shortly be able to follow my monthly reports on Facebook |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COUNTY BUDGET BALANCED – DOING MORE, BETTER, WITH LESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ February's Full Council have endorsed plans to deliver a balanced budget despite huge pressures on finances. The proposals look to deliver £18m of savings in the next financial year while protecting frontline services and meeting the rising demand for services. Like all local authorities, the council has faced a dramatic reduction in funding over the last six years and has made more than £120m of savings. This year alone the key funding from Government is falling by a further £16m. The 2017/18 budget has also balanced. ○ Council also agreed a revised approach to managing our finances through the creation of 6 cross cutting themes, bringing an end to the 'salami slicing' approach. The future savings targets for 2017/18 focus on increased efficiency, better use of technology, getting more from contracts and reducing agency staff contracts. "We have to find savings and are committed to doing so in a way that allows us to carry on delivering services we can continue to be proud of. An emphasis will be on bringing our spend in certain key areas into line with other good performing authorities, to make sure we are getting the services we want at a price we can afford." ○ The savings for 2017/18 set out in the reports include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1.5m from the return of South West One services to the authority. • £400,000 from reduced spend on agency staff • £1.6m from better contracting. • £10m from redesigning services and bringing down spend in some key areas - such as care placements for children and adults - into line with good performing authorities; ○ SCC continues to draw down the inherited debt of £350 million, incurred by the previous administration, which is still costing SCC £100,000 a day in interest. ○ Having protected residents for 6 six years from tax increases, Council also authorised a Council Tax increase of 1.99%, a further 2% ring-fenced for Adult Social Care along with keeping the Somerset Rivers Authority precept at last year's level of 1.25%. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant boost for Somerset youth clubs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Somerset County Council has granted over £72,000 to 22 youth clubs across the County to help run popular activities. The grants from the County Council are being matched by over £151,000 in locally raised funding and hundreds of hours in volunteers' time – all for the benefit of Somerset's young people. Somerset youth clubs are so valuable for our young people and we are really pleased we have been able to offer them some support through grant funding, boosting the continued hard work of numerous local volunteers and fundraisers who help these youth clubs to thrive. ○ The clubs in South Somerset which will receive grants are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ArchiesXtra in Somerton will receive £3440 ▪ The Charltons Youth Club in Charlton Adam will receive £3,470 ▪ Hambridge & Westport Youth Club will receive £2,000 |

- Hamdons Youth Group in Norton sub Hamdon will receive £1,960
- Hamdons Youth Group in Stoke sub Hamdon will receive £3,550
- Martock Youth Club will receive £3,800
- Tintinhull Youth Club will receive £1,500

• **Community Asset Fund**

- Sport England has opened its £7.5m 'Community Asset Fund' which is designed to enhance community spaces that provide people with an opportunity to be active. If members are aware of an organisation that wishes to take over a sports facility; a club that wishes to expand or just something missing in a community, it might be worth considering this fund which will provide capital grants of between £5,000 and £150,000.
- The Fund is not just about facilities, and doesn't have to be based around a traditional sport, but really anything that promotes activity and wellbeing. Sport England say they "want to hear from all kinds of community organisations and social enterprises that have a great idea that'll get people moving".

• **Sherborne Road - Planning ahead for rescheduled drainage scheme in Yeovil**

- A major engineering scheme in Yeovil which was rescheduled from before Christmas at the request of the community is now set to take place in the summer. Somerset County Council had been looking to take advantage of a gap between other schemes to carry out vital drainage improvement works on the A30 Sherborne Road in November. Work would have been completed before December when there is a County Council embargo on roadworks to avoid disruption to traders in the run-up to Christmas. However, following discussions with local business groups, it was agreed to put the scheme on hold until other works in the area are completed. Somerset County Council is now looking to carry out the work in the summer holidays, potentially starting on Monday 25 July.
- The stretch of Sherborne Road in question is showing significant signs of deterioration and highways teams have made 49 visits to temporarily repair cracks and potholes over the past 18 months. In order to tackle the fundamental structural issues it will be necessary to first upgrade the drainage before full resurfacing at a later date (likely to be in winter 2018 with night-time working).
- Details are still being finalised and further information will follow as the extent of the scheme becomes clearer. You can keep up to date with the latest on the roads including live incidents and planned roadworks at www.travelsomerset.co.uk or follow @TravelSomerset on Twitter.

• **A 'Big Day' for Learning Disability in Somerset**

- More than 100 people took part in the second annual 'Big Day' event organised by Somerset's Learning Disability Partnership Board in February. The 'Big Day' event was supported by Somerset County Council and the Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and attracted people with learning disabilities, carers, service providers and other organisations that have an interest in supporting people with learning disabilities. They were able to find out more about the Learning Disability Joint Self-Assessment, which helps people with learning disabilities and their families discuss what services are working well for them and what needs to get better. Speakers this year included people who use direct payments to organise their own care and people who have bought their own home with help from a government home ownership scheme.
- Attendees also had a chance to browse stalls about local support services, activity groups, health advice and employment opportunities, and an opportunity to 'try out' some assistive technology which can help with everyday tasks.
- Partnership Board members have an interest in improving services for people with learning disabilities and their families and work with and give advice to councils, health, service providers and other groups to make things better for people in their community. The board are actively seeking more members to help with their work and hope to increase membership following the day.
- Somerset County Council and Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group supported the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board to organise the 'Big Day' event.

• **A Service Fit For The Future. Learning Disability services 'will improve' and 'will modernise' making it fit for the future when it transfers to a new Social Enterprise**

- With the number of adults with learning disabilities in Somerset set to increase, it is even more important that the new not for profit Social Enterprise contracted by Somerset County Council last July delivers the services users need and want, now and in future. Somerset County

Council Chairman Christine Lawrence accepted during Full Council today a petition with over 800 signatures from staff, Learning Disabilities service users and families. There were also a dozen critical questions and a protest outside Shire Hall against the transfer.

- The decision to move to a social enterprise was done for a very specific reason – it will be better in the long run for our service users. The result will be a better service and one that is sustainable in the long-term as we manage the reduced funding that all local authorities have to live with. We want better and we believe this contract will deliver better outcomes for our service users. The Somerset Social Enterprise is committed to meeting the future needs of people with learning disabilities across Somerset. In doing so, it will draw upon its reputation for innovation in the sector to further develop support, focusing on enabling customers to contribute to their communities as active citizens and lead fulfilling lives. We have gone to great lengths to engage with service users, parent/carers, staff and unions and shared information as and when we have it. This will continue with ongoing conversations before any formal consultation around terms and conditions and a review of day services which, over the next year, will involve customers, their parent/carers and staff in helping design the support they want to see.

• **Could you be a Foster Carer for an asylum-seeking child?**

- We urgently need people who can offer a safe home to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving from the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe. Somerset County Council has accepted more than 17 unaccompanied children already and more are expected. Most of the children arriving in Somerset are aged 15 or older, travelling from countries including Afghanistan, Albania and Eritrea.
- One couple have already taken one child “We are so lucky to have the young man living with us that we do, he is hard-working, respectful, kind and even takes our grandchildren out to play football. He has a thirst for knowledge and is really enjoying being at school – it’s been a pleasure to help him learn new skills and to be able to facilitate a new life for him here.”

• **Ofsted finds that outcomes for Somerset children are improving**

- Somerset County Council’s services for vulnerable children and young people are improving, according to the latest feedback from Ofsted. The letter from inspectors follows a ‘monitoring visit’ last month which looked at how the authority works with children and young people in need of help and protection. It identifies areas of strength and areas where improvements are still happening, concluding that change is happening at an adequate pace. Inspectors also highlighted weaker areas and the need for more consistency to make sure that the good examples become the norm in all areas.
- This is the latest external report on the authority’s Children’s Services and follows a letter sent in December by Edward Timpson, Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families, which highlighted ‘tangible’ improvements.
- Reducing caseloads and improving the ratio of permanent to locum staff is key to improvement. Following a recruitment drive and improvements to career development opportunities and training programmes, the authority is ahead of targets to increase the proportion of permanent staff.
- Somerset is leading a partnership of South West local authorities delivering a Step Up to Social work programme which encourages graduates to choose a career in social work. The partnership has just been successful in a bid for funding for a second round of training that will bring a further 49 children’s social workers into the region. Last year also saw a record 96 per cent of newly qualified social workers choosing to stick with Somerset after they finish their first year in the role.

• **A £24m for economic growth deal won from London**

- Somerset will benefit from around £24m of Government funding for five key projects to boost employment and economic growth. Today's Growth Deal funding announcement from Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy allocated £43.5m to the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSW LEP), in which Somerset County Council is a key partner. A prospering local economy is vital to Somerset's future and all of these projects will open up opportunities for growth, employment and more investment. We have a strong economy and it's important that as a County Council we play our part in looking ahead and making sure it goes from strength to strength.
- It means around £24m of support for projects in Somerset as well as others that benefit the LEP area as a whole and includes:
 - **Somerset Energy Innovation Centre** phase 3 in Bridgwater – around £2.7m to develop a further 2,000 sqm of office, meeting and collaborative space for local businesses.
 - **Connecting Devon and Somerset Phase 3** – around £7.5m to deliver superfast broadband to more properties to increase coverage to 100 per cent by 2020.
 - **iAero project in Yeovil** – around £3.75m to construct an aerospace innovation and collaboration space to support business growth and create higher level jobs.
 - **Toneway Corridor** capacity improvements (Phase 1 Creech Castle) in Taunton – around £6.3m to make enhancements to the road between the M5 and Taunton town centre to support growth in the town.
 - **Huntspill Energy Park in Bridgwater** – around £3.9m to open up a 91 hectare enterprise zone with new highway link and roundabout to support business growth, potentially including the Hinkley supply chain.
- This announcement follows on from the successful Growth Deal rounds 1 and 2 which previously secured £195.5m of Government investment from for the HotSW LEP area.