

COUNTY COUNCIL CONSERVATIVE GROUP

BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

OCTOBER 2018

Financial Imperative Work: SCC have been highlighting, for the last 18 months, the pressures they are facing as funding from central government continues to fall and the demands and costs continues to rise.

Nearly all local authorities are facing similar challenges, as the developments in Northamptonshire, East Sussex and more recently Oxfordshire, demonstrate. Top-tier rural authorities with responsibility for vulnerable children and adults (which accounts for over 2/3rd of total SCC budget), are under huge financial pressure.

Despite lobbying, there has been no discernible shift in Government policy or funding. Unlike other public services, SCC have to deliver a balanced budget and the funding received now falls far short of meeting the costs of the critical services provided.

The Cabinet Committee agreed in-year savings on 12 September of £12 million affecting over 70 budget lines, in all directorates. The consequences of not taking this action, of not bringing SCC to financial sustainability, would sadly be very much tougher in the medium term.

Delivery of the new schools programme: This month sees the next step on the way to making sure SCC have the right education provision in the right places for children with special educational needs or disabilities. Meeting their needs, near their homes, so they don't have travel long distances or go out of county to find the right school is vitally important for their development, opportunities and quality of life. Selworthy School in Taunton is expanding on to a second site, Hazelbrook (Where the old St Augustine's School used to be) and a brick laying ceremony takes place this month. It is expected the school will open for September 2019.

Social Care for Older People: Somerset's Home First initiative, has in the first year of operation, resulted in over 2,000 patients avoiding 7,500 bed nights in hospital. This has made significant cost savings for the NHS and improved the quality of life for the people involved. To date the overall delayed discharges across the County have reduced by 75% from 3,500 bed nights to 800.

Secondary Schools Admission Deadline: With a 31 October deadline, there are now just weeks left for parents to submit applications for secondary school places – for children moving from Primary to Secondary school or Middle to Upper school in September 2019. Whether your child is starting school for the first time, or transferring to their next school, applications need to be made through SCC's website www.somerset.gov.uk/admissions

Hinkley Point update: Two years after Hinkley Point C was fully launched, the scale of construction and progress continues to be on track. More than 3,200 people are now at work building the new nuclear power station in Somerset. The project is on track for its next major milestone in 2019 – the completion of the 4,500 tonne concrete platform on which the reactor buildings sit.

Proud to produce in Somerset: County Hall is the venue for the National Farmers Union event called Proud to Produce in Somerset. This event will spotlight the importance and the challenges of our rural businesses to the thriving Somerset economy.

Improving Health and Wellbeing: Spark, a local Somerset voluntary sector organization provides information, advice, training and support to charities and community groups in South Somerset, Mendip and Sedgemoor. They have organised an inspiring event at 7:15pm on Tuesday 16th October, at the Edgar Community Hall in Somerton, to showcase how people in Somerset communities are working together to improve local health and wellbeing. It's open to town and parish councillors, community groups, and anybody with an interest in improving health & wellbeing in their community. For further information contact: Matt Day on 07714 648913

Flu Vaccine: Flu is a serious illness in vulnerable people, potentially causing deaths and complications such as pneumonia. SCC urge all eligible residents to protect themselves and get a flu jab. Flu outbreaks can also cause severe disruption to health and social care services in the winter months. The flu vaccine is still the best protection we have against an unpredictable virus. It can reduce the risk of serious illness. Please check with GP's or local pharmacists for details of vaccination centres.

Potholes: As we come to the end of a 'long hot summer' the number of potholes being reported on the highways has fallen to a record weekly low, down to 164 against 1034 at the beginning of May. Pothole repairs continue to meet the ongoing demand with 182 filled during the last week of September. As we come into the winter months, members of the public can help SCC Highways stay on top of carriageway repairs by reporting defects through <http://www.travelsomerset.co.uk>

Library Services: Recommendations for the future for Somerset's libraries service will be published this month. During the recent libraries service consultation over 7,000 responses were received including nearly 13,000 comments. These have been carefully reviewed and analysed over the summer and a report detailing the consultation findings and the council's recommendations is expected to be published online on 16 October ahead of discussion by the council's Scrutiny Committee on 24 October.

Getting the facts on Fostering: Many people considering fostering think about it long before making an enquiry and do lots of research online. The newly launched <http://www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk> website from the Somerset County Council fostering service 'Fostering in Somerset' gives people a real insight into fostering and the benefits of working with a non-profit service.