

Full Council Meeting – 15 December 2020

Report of Councillor Chris Booth – Community

I just want to start off with a big thank you again to all those in our various communities across our district for once again coming together through the November Lockdown to provide for those most in need and assist where possible. From this bleak year has come a silver lining of how important it is to be able to help your neighbour or support those less fortunate than yourself.

Community Chest

As of 24 November 2020 we have approved and spent £137,649 from the £250,000 (I can provide a current update if Council wishes) - almost exactly 55% - benefitting 37 different schemes/projects at an average grant of just under £4,000 each. We have had a range of proposals, the majority of which (surprisingly) have come from the western side of the district. They are typically being paid 15 days from the date of application.

At the time, the team discussed that to complete our objective of covering as many parts of our district as possible, we wish to see more bids come from the likes of the Blackdowns, Neroche, East Deane, Norton Fitzwarren, the rural areas surrounding Wellington, and Cotford St Luke.

CCTV

The majority of cameras are now fully working again in West Somerset (with the exception of three, which we are working on). We are now working towards securing the longevity of these, as well as reviewing those in Taunton Deane.

Equality and Diversity Group

In October, we had a first meeting to discuss what areas we'd like to discuss and outcomes we'd like to achieve. We are hoping to have our next meeting soon to start addressing particular issues of concern to members.

DISC Scheme and Radio Networks

I understand that members are concerned at the current state of things as neither seems to be running as to pre-Covid standard which is immensely frustrating. Our officers are trying to make sense of what Sedgemoor is planning, which ultimately runs the contract, and what this means for local businesses. I am disappointed at the lack of progress that has been made, as Sedgemoor has been going through staffing changes and not through lack of trying our end. I will continue to ensure I apply pressure in having a conclusion to this for you as soon as possible or relay what options we may seek to take.

Food Larder

On 26 November 2020, SWT hosted a virtual information event on food provision and the community pantry scheme. It was well attended, about 30 people, and well received. The speakers were informative and inspirational, and I'm hopeful there will be some new projects emerging. Slides are available if members wish to see them. We are hoping to have at least one Community Pantry in the district by Spring 2021, the keys to this being; a secure weekly food source and a partner organisation. Thank to you to the councillors who attended this fantastic meeting.

Public Space Protection Order (PSPO)

Since the initial consultation was set up and pulled because of Covid for a potential PSPO in Taunton, things have changed hugely. Partnership working with the Police has increased since Covid, allowing us more flexibility and often current legislation does cater for a lot of the issues being encountered. It's thought best at present to hold PSPO to save costs and at a time where police resources are too stretched to be able to enforce it. Of course, we are happy to work with any parish or town council that still believes that such an order would benefit their area.

Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board

Obviously Covid remains the main priority which you are routinely updated on but elsewhere from the Board:

Signing of the MoU - Improving Health and Care Through the Home in Somerset: the commitment for health, care and housing services to work together to support the vulnerable.

There is a commitment to establish a Somerset Homelessness Reduction Board.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Climate Change agreed - a county-wide recognition of the impacts on health from Climate Change after all councils declared a Climate Emergency.

Domestic Violence is a high priority and SWT, amongst others, is supporting the national initiative '16 Days of Action' which asks employers to support their staff.

There has been progress in improving adult safeguarding across Somerset but still work to be done in areas such as recognising abuse and recognising risk through data.

Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel

Main updates include an extra £200,000 that was allocated to the Commissioner's Community Fund to help organisations and groups affected by the Covid downturn. There has also been money secured from the Ministry of Justice to employ a new Sexual Violence Advisor to support in this constabulary area, as well as additional funding for protecting vulnerable children and £400,000 from the Home Office to protect and tackle rises in burglary.

Obviously, the budget has been completely thrown by the pandemic and with money being pumped into more police time as well as dealing with matters such as court delays. Unfortunately, the forthcoming budget for next year does stand to be quite bleak after shoots of growth had shown in the current year's budget.

The biggest contention recently has been a long on-going issue around the Lloyds Victim Group and their relationship to Lloyds Bank HQ in Bristol (please search online for more information), in that they feel the decision that nothing illegal had taken place in the Bristol, compared to in Reading where fraud was encountered, was incorrect because of missed evidence and failure to investigate particular people. They naturally have put a lot of pressure on the Police and Crime Commissioner and the panel over the last couple of years. Recently, the board and I had fake 'summons' sent to our addresses which, while I am very sympathetic to their cause, I didn't appreciate as it felt like I was being treated like a criminal. We had an emergency meeting as to whether we needed to re-discuss this but the majority agreed that the role of the panel is to scrutinise the Police and Crime Commissioner and scrutinising the Constabulary as a whole fell outside our remit.

Free School Meals

Free School Meal Provision has been a big topic recently and during October half term was a concern as local businesses and organisations stepped up and distributed food where there were gaps. Lack of timely communication from Somerset County Council was a concern and expectation that families were expected to contact CV helpline to be referred to a village agent to get access to frozen meals seemed a bit odd. However, we're glad to say we know that at Christmas, families will be receiving 2 x £15 food vouchers per child via government funding with the continuing of emergency food parcels to those most vulnerable. We hope there will be more to come forward in the future as we collectively try to tackle this unacceptable situation.

One Team

North Taunton

Window Wanderland family, covid friendly activity launched <https://www.windowwanderland.com/event/east-north-taunton-2020/> in North & East Taunton 21st November till 2nd December - in brief, a window and garden light displays put up in the area so everyone can go out and enjoy seeing the displays. This was featured on the Somerset Gazette website and an interview on The Breakfast Show on BBC Somerset.

Primary schools in NT had free workshops and good engagement from Priorswood Community Centre, Library and Brook Green Nursery.

Taunton North Youth Club only running activities that can take place outdoors so a lot less going on for C&YP.

Police are noticing increases in ASB in parks, particularly Lyngford Park and increasing their patrols to those areas. Community feeling that the park is somewhere children and families can't go to after late afternoon.

10 YP (aged 13-18) have been attending Activity Days at Kilve once a week for 5 weeks along with PCSOs. YP identified by police in consultation with partner agencies. Funded activities, lunch and transport were provided by Quantock Landscaping Partnership Scheme. This was very successful and well attended.

Halcon

Police being asked to increase patrols around Lambrook after a spate of vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

The Link Centre continues to be an incredible link to the community in providing meals and support.

Hoping to get planter regeneration project back on track to help improve the appearance of the area, as well as potentially leading to a food-planting project that could help with food poverty.

Wellington

A massive thank you to the amount of local businesses and organisations that came together over the past months to ensure that enough food and supplies are provided to those most in need, whether it be via businesses or through schools, the imbedded sense of community that already existed in Wellington has really shown through as a model of how a town can work to the betterment of its people.

Locality Update

The weekly newsletter continues to be published to members and parish councils. We are currently pulling together the 36th edition! The newsletter continues to be well received by the intended audience and we are very grateful to our partners who make regular weekly contributions.

Claire Thackray has been working with SWT operatives and Ruishton and Creech St Michael Parish Councils to address flood prevention issues. She has also been working with Friends of Netherclay (FON) who are taking the necessary steps with SWT to be able to register for Government external funding. Before FON can apply for a Woodland Management Plan or Countryside Stewardship, the land needs to be registered with the Rural Payment Agency (RPA). Once this application has been submitted / successful the FON will be able to apply for a grant which will contribute to the cost of creating a woodland management plan. Ultimately we hope to empower this group to manage this area on our behalf, thus reducing the demand on Open Spaces and extending community involvement and ownership.

There is a very similar situation over at the Children's Wood, Taunton. Here we have a willing group of people, a ready-made management plan and some labour via Somerset Wildlife Trust project. SWT is very keen to support the up and coming

Friends Group, again for the similar reasons outlined in the paragraph above. Both Jonathan Stevens and myself are in the process of arranging an onsite meeting in December 2020 when lockdown restrictions are eased. As Engagement Lead, I have been tasked with pulling this project together. I hope to have some good news for you soon!

Sam Murrell is aware of the ongoing works at Blue Anchor Bay and the Watchet Harbour / dredging: more extensive details no doubt will be provided by Chris Hall. Sam continues to provide ongoing support to the parishes, community groups, and businesses in the former West Somerset area by way of signposting others to further information and advice about SWT services.