

COUNTY COUNCIL CONSERVATIVE GROUP

BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

JANUARY 2018

School Autism Centres: Three new school autism centres are to open next year thanks to more than £2m of investment from Somerset County Council. Westover Green Community School in Bridgwater is set to open its new, 14-place facility in January after a £700,000 investment. It will feature two large learning spaces, a smaller group room, sensory room, kitchen, office and an accessible bathroom to help students enjoy their education and receive additional support.

Later in the year a similar base is due to be completed at Holway Park School, Taunton, along with an extended and refurbished base at Heathfield Community School, also in Taunton. Together, the developments amount to £2.3m of investment from the County Council creating 48 places for primary and secondary school children.

Business Rates Relief Pilot: In the recent Local Authority Financial Settlement the Government chose not to award Business Rate Retention Pilot status to Somerset despite it having the full backing of the County Council and the five District Councils. This decision has not been fully explained and unfortunately leaves the County Council needing to find a further £4 million of cost savings in 2018-19.

County Highways over the Christmas Period: Ensuring that the County's roads were kept clear this festive session, the Highways Team attended 33 incidents over the Christmas period. High winds on Christmas Day led to numerous tree falls, including at New Cross in South Petherton where 12 trees fell. Winds decreased on Boxing Day, but there was heavy rain countywide. Many minor roads, alongside some of our major routes experienced flooding.

Ultrafast Broadband: Thousands more homes and businesses in Somerset are in line for access to superfast broadband following a major Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) expansion plan. The Government's Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) agency has given the go-ahead for CDS to increase access to the ultrafast broadband network being delivered by Gigaclear for around 20,000 homes and businesses initially, in hard to reach rural communities across Somerset. Information about the Gigaclear roll-out timetable for CDS will be updated regularly on the web at <http://www.gigaclear.com/connecting-devon-and-somerset-rollout-schedule>. Residents and businesses can also expect to receive news and information from Gigaclear and CDS by post.

Yeovil Western Corridor: Anyone with a question about a major road improvement scheme in Yeovil can now meet with the contractor at a weekly drop-in centre. The Western Corridor scheme is a multi-million pound package

of improvements by Somerset County Council to increase the capacity of several junctions and upgrade links for pedestrians and cyclists. The scheme is being delivered by contractor Alun Griffiths (Contractors) Ltd who have now set up a Project Information Centre (PIC) at Palmers Garden Centre. This will be open every Tuesday between 1.30pm and 5.30pm.

A361 Roadwork disruption: A major engineering scheme to resurface a busy road near Durston on the outskirts of Taunton is planned for next year. A 1.7-mile section of the A361 from Walford Cross to the Sedgemoor border is showing signs of deterioration and needs to be fully re-surfaced. Work is proposed to start on Monday 19 February and take around three weeks, with the road closed during working hours (approximately 7.30am to 6.30pm).

Home First initiative: Since the Home First initiative launched in September over 300 people have been supported to leave hospital sooner and average stays have been reduced by five days for each person. Home First allows people to leave hospital rather than waiting for care assessments and rehabilitation planning, instead they receive the assessments and support at home, or care home or community hospital, to help them get back on their feet.

The Home First approach has been adopted both at Taunton's Musgrove Park Hospital and Yeovil District Hospital. Since the Home First initiative was introduced at Musgrove in late September, almost 190 more patients have been able to leave hospital earlier to be supported at home, and a further 47 patients are currently on the Home First pathway. This has also freed up almost 20 hospital beds a week.

Illegal roadworks: Utility firm, Bristol Water has been pleaded guilty and fined by Magistrates relating to three offences of unauthorised roadworks. Somerset County Council does its best to plan ahead and avoid overlapping or clashing works and unauthorised works and road closures make this difficult job even harder. The charges relate to the Highways Act and New Roads and Street Works (NRSWA) Act and involved three separate incidents of an illegal road closure, unauthorised occupation of the Highway and incorrect work permissions.

School Admissions 2019-2020: A consultation on school admissions arrangements for all children who are due to start, transfer or move schools during the 2019-20 school year is currently taking place until 31st January 2018. This consultation applies to those Voluntary Aided schools and Academies in Somerset who have contracted with the Local Authority to consult on their admission arrangements on their behalf. The consultation allows parents, early years settings, schools, religious authorities and the local community to make any comments on proposed admission arrangements. Details can be found at: <http://www.somersetconsults.org.uk/consult.ti/AdmissionConsultation1920/consultationHome>