

## COUNTY COUNCIL CONSERVATIVE GROUP

### BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

#### SEPTEMBER 2018

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

Local authorities up and down the country are facing similar challenges, as the developments in Northamptonshire, and more recently East Sussex, demonstrate. All of local government, particularly top-tier rural authorities with responsibility for vulnerable children and adults (which accounts for over 2/3<sup>rd</sup> 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 will therefore consider in-year savings proposals for decision when it meets on 12 September. The consequences of not taking this action, of not bringing SCC to financial sustainability, would sadly be even tougher for residents.

**Dementia Day Services:** As the number of people diagnosed with Dementia in Somerset rises, Somerset County Council is reviewing how it provides daytime activities and respite for people with Dementia and their carers. The County Council is proposing to enable communities to support their own needs, by allocating a community grants programme focussing on specialist support services for people with dementia. The grant will be intended for grass roots organisations and to continue supporting existing community run groups to continue their work.

A series of engagement events have been planned to allow people to visit several venues in the county where officers will be at hand to explain the proposals and answer any questions. Engagement events start on September 10<sup>th</sup> at Wincanton Library and will continue all the way throughout the month at various locations across the county.

**Rural Life Museum:** The school holidays have seen excellent attendances at the Somerset Rural Life Museum. Attractions for children have include a “rural life treasure hunt”, and a fascinating exhibition showing how local women contributed to the cause of Suffrage 100 years ago this year.

**Cresta Swimming Pool:** A decision has been taken to close the ageing Cresta Swimming Pool in Chard, which is ten years beyond its life expectancy and requires an injection of around a million pounds to keep it viable. However, there are hopes that a group of volunteers from the Chard community may be able to take over the running of the pool and as such it will be 'mothballed' for three months to allow them time to develop their plans to re-open it.

**Hinkley Point:** The long spell of warm dry weather has meant that EDF Energy have been able to make good progress at Hinkley Point. They report that the building programme remains on schedule and that the commissioning of the aggregate jetty is scheduled for Quarter 2 of 2019. This should remove a considerable amount of Hinkley related lorry traffic from Somerset roads.

**The Dragon Patcher:** The Dragon Patcher is due to arrive in Somerset this month. It is an innovative machine that can deliver road repairs up to five times faster than a traditional carriageway patching gang and can be controlled by one operator. As well as simply filling potholes, it can also be used to treat sections of road with cracks or minor deterioration to prevent potholes forming in future. The machine will operate until early November, depart during the colder months and then return at the end of Feb, into March.

**MMR Vaccine:** All parents and carers are advised to check whether their children have been fully immunised before the start of the school term. It is quick and easy to get and really is the best protection for every child. If anyone is concerned that children have missed a dose, a catch-up vaccine can easily be arranged by contacting their GP. Measles is highly contagious and very nasty, so if their children need it they should not put off having the vaccination.

**Flu vaccination:** Summer is almost at an end and it is time to think about plans for the winter. Flu can be a real killer. It is easily transmitted and even people with mild or no symptoms can still infect others. The vaccination is the best protection that we have. Details of vaccination centres will soon be available so please check with GP's or local pharmacists.

**Highways Updates:** A new webpage to help residents find out about planned maintenance on Somerset's roads is now available. Somerset County Council's dedicated travel and roadwork's website [www.travelsomerset.co.uk](http://www.travelsomerset.co.uk) previously only included works when dates were confirmed. The new webpage allows people to view the structural maintenance programme for the current year, so people can find out if improvement works are planned in the near future. The exact timings of work are added to the live map when they are finalised.

**BBC Countryfile Roads Article:** BBC Countryfile recently ran an article on a trial in Cumbria to repair roads using recycled plastics. This has created a lot of interest in the possibility for Somerset's Highways. SCC started to discuss this option for road maintenance back in January 2018 and whilst the technology is still very much in the early stages, the trial in Cumbria looks extremely encouraging. SCC are currently working with Skanska and their supply chain to develop this option in more detail and are hopeful to commence a trial in the near future.

