

County Councillor's Brief for Town & Parish Councils



South Petherton and Islemoor Division

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- **iAero Innovation Centre Funded.** Twenty odd years ago I was closely involved as the Defence Attache in Morocco trying to sell the Super Lynx from Westlands. It was therefore a real delight to be part of the decision made on 19 October by Somerset's Cabinet to help to fund a cutting-edge aerospace technology centre in Yeovil. This initiative endorses a flagship development in the iAero initiative that looks to cement Somerset's position at the centre of the country's aerospace industry. Aerospace is arguably the county's most important area of manufacturing – there are around 200 supply chain businesses and in South Somerset alone it accounts for around 8 per cent of total employment. It is part of the global industry and if we want these jobs to stay, we need to ensure Somerset remains an attractive place for these businesses to stay, grow and innovate. It is estimated the centre will cost around £10m to establish and the Cabinet agreed to allocate £1m from its capital programme – money that cannot be spent on day-to-day running costs – as its contribution. Other funding is expected to come from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, £2.5m from EU Structural Funds and £2.5m from industry sources. So, this iAero initiative is about securing the future of a strategically important industry in the county and, in doing so, investing in Somerset jobs prospects, future economic prosperity and business rate income for the Council. This Centre is a really positive move for Yeovil, Somerset and is of national importance.

- **Transforming Health and Social Care.** This is an update on how Somerset is transforming Health and Social Care. There are two major programmes in place and working hard for all residents. These are **Somerset Together, the Sustainability and Transformation Plan** for Health and Social Care and the other is **Adult Social Care Improvement Programme**.

- **Why are we doing this work.** The population is forecasted to grow by 6.6% and the number of people over 65 will increase by 30% by 2021. At the same time the number of people with two or more major long term conditions will increase by 24%. These are dramatic and serious statistics and collectively we have a system that is struggling to cope. The NHS gap in health funding this financial year is £33 million. Nationally and locally there are shortages of GP's, Nurses, Consultants and Social Workers.

- **So what is the answer: Better Care by Working Together.** The STP brings us together to create a better, more sustainable care system combining Health and Social Care. The main elements of the plan include: **Healthier Life Styles, Prevention** supporting people to live healthier lives and avoid preventable illness and injury; **Easier Access** and better wider **Use of Technology**; **Support closer to Home** for residents, a complete focus on **Care for the Person**; **Hearts and Minds**, 1 in 4 adults suffer a mental health problem annually, needing a responsive, informed care system in which people can be swiftly diagnosed and treated; **No Place Like Home** staying in hospital is a last resort not the first port of call, safely recovering at home is far better than staying in hospital. Underlying all this is to ensure we all, young and old, take **greater personal Responsibility**, as individuals and as families, for ourselves, our bodies our health and well-being. The priorities in STP focus on Prevention through a Prevention Charter for Somerset, plus creating healthy individuals and communities; Primary Care, enhancing GP services with new roles, giving GPs Acute Care and the Community.

- **Adult Social Care Improvement.** Within the County Council we have seen a multitude of lessons from our Children's Improvement Programme. We have taken those and are applying the best to our Social Care for adults. This is a long term, ongoing, programme that dovetails neatly into the Health and Social Care STP.

- Today's decision is a welcome boost following the recent announcement that the GKN facility in Yeovil faces possible closure. Aerospace is arguably the county's most important area of manufacturing – there are around 200 supply chain businesses and in South Somerset alone it accounts for around 8 per cent of total employment. It is part of the global industry and if we want these jobs to stay, we have to make sure Somerset remains an attractive place for these businesses to stay, grow and innovate. This initiative is about securing the future of strategically important industry in the county and, in doing so, investing in Somerset jobs prospects, future economic prosperity and business rate income for the Council. Leonardo Helicopters is the largest aerospace company in Somerset. The company has welcomed Somerset County Council's commitment to the iAero project and the benefits it will bring to small and medium sized aerospace companies in the local area, many of which are the suppliers. The engagement with local authorities to maximise the economic and employment benefits iAero will bring has been welcomed. It is estimated the centre will cost around £10m to establish and today Cabinet agreed to allocate £1m from its capital programme – money that cannot be spent on day-to-day running costs – as its contribution. Other funding is expected to come from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, £2.5m from EU Structural Funds and £2.5m from industry sources.

- **Decision on emergency bus funding.** Although it does not affect South Somerset, the withdrawal of emergency funding to some bus services in Wookey Hole, Burnham on Sea, Wells and Bridgwater in December holds lessons for us all - namely Use it or Lose it. The County Council spends around £1.6m each year subsidising bus services across the county, but the huge pressure on all its budgets means it cannot afford to continue these particular arrangements. The average number of passengers per trip on the C and F services is four, and seven on the 67, costing an extra £22,000 per a month. The County Council continues to fund the Slinky service and financially support demand responsive Community Transport schemes by covering half the cost of fares for journeys made using concessionary bus passes. In the coming weeks transport officers will be contacting bus operators and parish councils to see if there are opportunities for community-supported, no or low-cost alternatives that the council can encourage and support to fill some of the gaps. Alternative arrangements will be available for County Ticket holders who use the services to get to college. Emergency funding has helped cover the costs of the services since the key operator ceased trading at short notice at the end of May. Temporary support for the three former Webberbus routes is unlikely to be extended when it runs out in December.

- **New regional contract for highways maintenance agreed.** Jointly with Devon and Plymouth, a new contract for highways maintenance in Somerset will be awarded to Skanska Construction UK Ltd, following a decision made by Somerset County Council's Cabinet. (19 Oct 16) The contract will initially run from 1 April 2017 until 31 March 2024, with the option to extend for a further three years based on performance. Skanska will be required to identify further savings, follow industry best-practice, support local communities, and reduce the number of potholes over the life of the contract. They will also be expected to keep 85% of supply chain spend in the local economy. Although the procurement process was joint, Devon County Council and Plymouth City Council will each have their own contract. The authorities and their contractors will work together through the lifetime of the contracts to continually improve the cost effectiveness of their highway services. Devon has also agreed to appoint Skanska as its new contractor, while Plymouth City Council awarded its contract to South West Highways Ltd. The total combined value of the contract is limited to £1.2bn over 10 years between the three authorities. For Somerset, the exact spend each year will vary depending on how much work is ordered and carried out.

- **Improving Road Safety in Somerset.** Based on Department for Transport figures, we have seen a 7% reduction in killed or seriously injured casualties. The total financial cost of traffic collisions in Somerset in the first half of the year was just under £31.5 million. There have been 13 fatalities, 68 serious injuries and 601 slight injuries in the first half of 2016. This is in fact a 7% reduction in killed or seriously injured casualties compared to same period in 2015. The only category of road users that has increased is Motorcyclists (49), a 4% increase; the rest have reduced. Pedestrians (53) are down 32%, Pedal Cyclists (50) are down (2% reduction) and car /taxis (also down 5%). **(January to June figures).** The emotional cost of these accidents is immeasurable. But the county Council works hard to make our roads safer by targeting education and training; enhancing

existing signage and white lines; developing traffic calming measures and visibility improvements; and investigating concerns over traffic speeds. Somerset Road Safety offers a comprehensive range of training and advice for all road users; see www.somersetroadsafety.org. All figures are provisional until signed off by the DfT at the end of the financial year 2017.

- **Council Finances.** This is a letter that was published in the Western Gazette 19 October, to supplement my comments last month.

Dear Madam Editor,

Having seen your editorial (Thu 6 Oct) about the county finances and the somewhat hysterical reaction elsewhere, including in your columns, may I point out a number of realities. Yes, over the last six years, the County Council has seen the revenue budget reduced by central government by over £100 million. Yes, with a smaller budget and the resulting reduction in staff, and with increasing demands on services for the most vulnerable in society, adults, children and health, it has become increasingly difficult to deliver our key services. But are we in crisis? No. Have we balanced the budget every year? Yes. Have we stopped capital spending on roads and broadband, absolutely not.

Moreover, this is a forecast, note the key word, a forecast, and based only on the first quarter of the financial year. If, and only if, our current level of expenditure continues at the same rate would the council overspend its budget. It will not. This time last year we were £14m over the forecasted budget. It was balanced by the following March. In fact it is quite normal for an increased rate of spending at the start of a year as contracts are renewed and so on. Rather than criticise, residents need to recognise and accept that we are totally on top of the issue. That is why you know where we are. In reality a 10 point plan, instigated some time ago, is already in place and working. That demonstrates we are totally in control of council spending and transparent about it as well.

Finally, it is timely to remind residents of the legacy. In 1990 the deficit was £17m for the incoming Liberal Democrat administration. When the Conservatives took back control in 2009 the County had borrowed 100% of its GDP, loans taken out at fixed, high interest rates, some for 50 years. £350 million borrowed; £30m a year in interest; that is £100,000 a day. Small wonder council tax was frozen, borrowing was stopped. In the meantime, this administration has constantly and continues to seek fairer funding from central government. Internally, the resulting improvements and efficiencies have ensured we can live within our means and provide better, leaner, more responsive support for the most vulnerable.

Your editorial was right to close with "a greater reliance on volunteers". It also means we must all change, taking a greater responsibility for ourselves and our families, our lives, our health and well-being. If we are to retain, as we want to do, support for the most vulnerable; change is necessary for Somerset and nationally. A country that works for everyone is an imperative, no longer a casual choice. Yours Sincerely Christopher

- **GKN/Leonardo.** I have repeated below a column published by Marcus Fysh. 13 Oct 16

Last week ended with some unsettling news about GKN as Leonardo consider taking the manufacture of Wildcat helicopter parts back in-house. It's a commercial decision and I am confident that many of those highly skilled engineering jobs will be kept in the area, and at the time of writing negotiations with unions are ongoing, but of course thoughts are with the employees and their families at this uncertain time. I am organising a meeting for those affected this Friday with practical help. I speak with Government Ministers on a regular basis about the helicopter industry in Yeovil and they are very supportive of it and want to keep it strong. Michael Fallon has confirmed that the Ministry of Defence is very keen to keep Leonardo as its helicopter manufacturing partner and has just signed a ten year strategic partnership to that effect.

It is a shame that at this time there are some looking out for any negative news to bolster their political agenda. Economies are strongly affected by business confidence and I would suggest that keeping ones fingers crossed for redundancies is not a healthy use of time. I am taking practical steps to encourage industry to increase our skilled engineering base and build on our rich engineering heritage in helicopters and beyond. Unemployment in the area has halved since 2010 and through infrastructure investment and education we can upskill our workforce further and these will be big focusses of my work in Westminster in this Parliamentary session. I raised GKN and the preservation and enhancement of skilled employment in the House of Commons on Monday and have secured meetings with relevant Ministers to discuss opportunities further. The Minister rightly pointed to the 1160 apprenticeships starting in the constituency in the last year as an excellent achievement for the local area. Marcus Fysh MP