

- Budget 2019-20 – The budget went through full council and in the end was not as painful as expected, because shortly beforehand it was calculated that we would have roughly £3.75 million more available for the year than originally thought. This meant many of the proposed £2 million frontline services cuts were able to be reversed, including cuts to gully clearing and jetting, verge cutting, flood water management, dementia support in care homes, and support to help vulnerable people into work. Also, £200,000 is being used to fund the outcomes of a full review of winter gritting in readiness for next winter - so potentially reversing the £120,000 saving approved last September I would like to think that councillors such as myself speaking out on the impact of such cuts on rural areas has contributed to the change of heart, even if only slightly. I have been making the point that whether you live in a rural or an urban area we all pay the same council tax but we are not all getting the same level of services for our money.
- Climate change emergency – County council agreed to declare a climate change emergency in Somerset and has allocated £25,000 towards the cost of looking at what the council can do to reduce its carbon footprint and reduce its impact on climate change. It was a cross-party initiative driven by an activist group calling itself Extinction Rebellion and which is trying to push this through every local council in the land. I did not support it, because I do not believe you elected me to save the world, I feel I was elected to make sure local issues were resolved, such as repairing potholes, keeping street lights working, resolving traffic issues, making sure schools deliver good quality education, etc. I also appreciate that £25k is half of the money we were saving by closing the park & ride on Saturdays!
- Junction 25 – I attended the official launch of the development last week by contractors Alun Griffiths (Contractors) Ltd. The contractors are holding a drop-in session for anybody interested in Ruishton Village Hall tomorrow (Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March) from 3 pm to 8 pm. The county's officers are also offering to meet with affected parish councils. 200 trees have been translocated to West Monkton. I have queried why local parish councils were not sounded out and have been promised that you will now be offered any further trees if you wanted to take them.
- Pavements – Despite pushing at every opportunity to have the pavements in Village Road resurfaced, the best I have been able to do is get county to agree to what is called micro-surfacing treatment. This will allow the sub-structure to remain undisturbed, which is the county's big concern because the coal tar material is carcinogenic and removing this alone would cost more than the entire reconstruction works. There is no timetable for when the micro-surfacing will be carried out. County in the meantime are carrying out regular inspections and will repair anything considered to be a highway defect.
- Broadband – The update on Connecting Devon and Somerset/Gigaclear which was supposed to go to scrutiny committee last week did not appear on the agenda at all. I have asked for an explanation and so far have only been told it was agreed to defer it (pretty obvious, I thought!). I have transcribed the audio recording of scrutiny committee from December, where I warned that this would be allowed to “slip and slip and slip” unless we kept up the pressure, and so it is proving to be. The audio also confirms my statement that a CDS members' briefing was to be issued in January – something else which has not happened. I have asked for an apology from the officers who told me that this was never promised.
- Adults with Learning Difficulties – A monthly peer support group is being started this month in Taunton Library. The first meeting is on Friday (15<sup>th</sup> March) from 11 am to 12.30 pm. It will be run by People First Dorset who successfully run similar sessions in Yeovil. The group offers an opportunity to make new friends, access support and information, gain new skills and confidence, and practice independent living skills. More info is available from People First Dorset by emailing [office@peoplefirstdorset.org.uk](mailto:office@peoplefirstdorset.org.uk).
- Children's services – A snap inspection by Ofsted has found an improving service with confident staff making good decisions. Previously, it had been a failing service and county has put millions of £s into it to attract new staff and set it on the way to becoming a good rated service.

- A358 Community Liaison Forum – You will be aware that the first forum session was held recently at Somerset County Cricket Club. Unfortunately, I could not get there but I have seen the notes circulated from it. The bottom line is that any work is unlikely to start for at least another four years.
- Stay Strong Stay Steady – County has been working with Age UK Somerset to support important research on how to provide services to reduce risk of falls and to run Stay Strong Stay Steady classes which provide an opportunity to meet others while building and maintaining strength, balance, and confidence in movement which are invaluable in helping people live independently as they age. More information is at <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/somerset/our-services/ageing-well-exercise-sessions/stay-strong-stay-steady>.
- Home First – This initiative is working well to reduce delayed transfers of care, as they are known - patients going home from hospital – and in December achieved the best results of any Westcountry local authority. Unfortunately, I don't have the actual figures to hand at the moment.
- Chairman's Award – Nominations are now open for the annual Chairman's Awards for Service to the Community. Deadline is Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May, and the awards ceremony is Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> July. This is the link for making nominations [www.somerset.gov.uk/chairawards](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/chairawards) and more info is available from Carol James by emailing [CDJames@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:CDJames@somerset.gov.uk).