

Report from Hilary Bastone – (My October notes for Parish Councils)

THIS MONTH'S TOPICS:

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Cost of living help and guidance

COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF)

JLP Appeals Digest

Sextortion and Blackmail

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THIS MONTH'S TOPICS IN MORE DETAIL:-

Dartmouth Lower Ferry Winter Refit Announced

Safety comes first and after a busy summer period crossing back and forwards across the river Dart, it's time for the hard-working Lower Ferry Floats to receive some well-earned recovery time.

With the quieter winter months approaching, the Dartmouth Lower Ferry will be moving to its winter rota from Monday 31 October until next Easter.

As with other years, this means there will be a single ferry service running to allow for the annual refits of the tugs and floats.

There are two floats in total, two Tom's and three Hauley's IV, V and VI and they all need to be kept in tip-top condition to help keep the district's traffic moving from side to side.

The first float, Tom Avis, will be docked for a refit from Monday 7 November for six weeks, followed by the Tom Casey at the beginning of February. Hauley V and Hauley VI will start their refits in November.

The refits are all an essential as part of the Maritime Coastguard Agency safety inspections to make sure the annual passenger certificate is continued.

South Hams District Council's Executive Member for Commercial Strategy, Cllr Hilary Bastone, said: "We will be using extra staff on the single ferry to speed up the service, during the annual refits to keep the impact on passengers as low as possible. This means our crossings will not be much slower than when both ferries are operating.

"As always the safety of our passengers and staff is our primary concern so these annual refits are an essential part of the smooth running of the service."

If there is a need during the winter period to increase to two ferries, for instance when the Higher Ferry carries out its own annual service, then we will briefly fill this gap to support our local residents and commuters.

For more information on the ferry, please visit: www.southhams.gov.uk/dartmouthlowerferry

Changes to Self-Catering Properties

- from 1 April 2023 -

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) has provided a briefing to local authorities on the activity it is starting to carry out around changes to eligibility rules for self-catering properties which mean the property can be assessed for business rates.

From 24 October the VOA started contacting customers to let them know about the new eligibility rules, with a mailshot to self-catering properties currently on the Rating List.

The new eligibility rules

Although the new eligibility rules come into force on 1 April 2023, for assessment purposes the VOA will look at letting information from the previous operating year. In order to be liable for business rates rather than council tax, the property must be:

available for letting commercially (with a view to making a profit) for short periods. These short periods must total 140 days or more in the previous and current year.

actually let commercially for 70 days or more in the previous 12 months.

Will the new eligibility rules apply to new holiday lets?

The rules will apply equally to all self-catering properties across England and Wales. New holiday lets will be liable for council tax each day until the property meets the eligibility rules.

Bird Flu

Following a number of detections of avian influenza in poultry and wild and captive birds across the southwest of England a regional Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) was declared on 31 August in Cornwall, Devon, Isles of Scilly and part of Somerset.

From 17 October the Prevention zone was declared across Great Britain.

All bird keepers must follow strict biosecurity measures to help protect their flocks from the threat of avian flu.

We have received notification of a confirmed case of Avian Influenza (HSN1) within a private flock of geese at a setting located in Dartington. The flock has been culled. This is the third notification within the Dartington area.

UKSA lead on cases of Avian Influenza and work closely with DEFRA, APHA and our Trading Standards (TS) colleagues. TS officers have met to implement their contingency plans and have convened a task group to respond to the incident locally. We have supported our Trading Standards colleagues by providing the use of one of our meeting rooms. They were planning some visits locally and within the Control zone along with a mail shot to property addresses.

Updated information can be found at the following links:

www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu#latest-situation

www.devonsomersettradingstandards.gov.uk/agriculture/animal-disease/avian-influenza-bird-flu/

www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu-cases-and-disease-control-zones-in-england

As a Local Authority, we are required to collect dead birds on public land if they pose a public health concern. Instances of dead birds can be reported through our website where locations will be triaged as to public health risk.

Any dead bird on private land is the landowner's responsibility to dispose of and information can be found here.

If there are concerns relating to birds not being housed, covered or other biosecurity measures at a setting, Trading Standards would be the organisation who would take the lead on investigating. Contact them at: tradingstandards@devon.gov.uk

Electoral Registration Canvassing

It is that time of year again when we will be sending out canvassers to all properties within the council area who are required but have not yet returned a Canvass Form with regard to Electoral Registration.

This is an annual process. The canvassers will be trying to make contact with those households who have not supplied information that we have requested under Electoral Registration legislation.

We will be advising the police that they will be calling on properties, but also wanted to inform you in case you have any contact from concerned residents. The canvassers will be carrying ID and will be delivering forms and not taking information at the doorstep, unless it is offered to them.

This is a statutory process which needs to be completed in advance of publishing the new Electoral Register on 1 December. We will also carry out some social media on this important process.

Annual Rough Sleeper Estimate

All local authorities are required to submit a 'snapshot' estimated figure on the number of rough sleepers in the local area during a specified night between 1 October and 30 November.

South Hams will be submitting an Estimate based on the number of people believed to be sleeping rough on the night of Monday 14 November through to Tuesday morning of 15 November.

We will also conduct a 'snapshot' count in Totnes as our main hotspot for people sleeping rough.

We choose to submit an estimate as the most accurate way of arriving at a number because due to the large geographic area of South Hams, a full count would not be able to encompass all the areas involved.

Instead, we work with partnership agencies such as the Police, Rough Sleeper Drop-In centres and park rangers to collate a figure based on verified sighting of rough sleepers or individuals we have very strong reason to believe were rough sleeping on the specified night.

Some rough sleepers will never make contact with the Housing Advice Service, so it would be very helpful if you let us know of anyone sleeping rough in the South Hams.

If you don't know their name, the place where they are usually found, and a brief description would suffice.

The definition of a rough sleeper, for the purpose of the Government's estimate is as follows:

People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes”).

Your help will ensure we get the most accurate figure possible to report back to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. We will also be consulting our colleagues in other voluntary and statutory agencies for their assistance too.

You are invited to attend a virtual meeting on the 15 November at 2pm to feedback any information you may have.

Alternatively, please e-mail before 11am on 15 November and I will ensure that your information is taken into account. Please let me know if you will be attending and I will send you the Teams' link prior to the meeting.

Please pass this email on to any of your colleagues who I may have missed.

We are committed to working with rough sleepers to try and find solutions to help them access accommodation. We will use the intelligence we get from our estimated counts to inform our ongoing work.

Coronation of His Majesty The King

Buckingham Palace has announced that the Coronation of His Majesty The King will take place on Saturday 6 May 2023 at Westminster Abbey.

This will follow the scheduled elections taking place on Thursday 4 May 2023.

The Palace have stated that further details will be announced in due course and clarity will be needed whether the May Day Bank Holiday will be moved. This would impact counts due to be held on the Friday.

Gypsy and Travellers Forum

We will be hosting another Gypsies, Travellers and Caravan Dwellers Drop In event on Wednesday 16 November in the Old Building of Follaton House at 5pm.

This is an opportunity for all Gypsies, Travellers and Caravan Dwellers to let us know what they think and ask questions of the relevant Council workers.

Garden waste collections ending this month

The garden waste collection service as it exists now will stop on 31 October. We'll be replacing it in the spring with an optional subscription service.

You should have received a letter from us detailing the changes we're making, including information on signing up for the new paid subscription service once it is available.

All residents should get their brown bin emptied a final time before the service ends on 31 October.

Garden Waste FAQs

Since announcing that we were ending the garden waste service, many of you have been asking us a variety of questions, including:

Why are you stopping garden waste collections?

How do I get rid of my brown bin if I no longer want it?

How do I subscribe to the new service?

You can find the answers to these and more questions on our new garden waste page.

What can I do with my garden waste in the meantime?

You can still take your garden waste to all three recycling centres in the South Hams. Full details, including opening hours, are available online.

Alternatively, people can find out more on home composting possibilities.

Reduced Council Tax Scheme - Have Your Say on Proposed Changes

South Hams District Executive agrees to ask the public for their opinion on changes to their Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The Consultation opens Monday 17 October and will run until 27 November.

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme is a scheme which is run by councils across the country. It recognises that households have different pressures and depending on where you live, your income, how many people live in your home, how many children you have and what benefits you already claim, you could have your council tax bill significantly reduced.

Each year councils must review their scheme and decide if they are going to make changes to it or leave it the same.

At a meeting on the Council's Executive (Thursday 13 October), the Executive agreed to go out to public consultation on the proposed changes, which would start in April next year and that reflect the extra pressures that many households are feeling right now.

The Council are inviting the public to tell them what they think of those proposed changes, before deciding if they should make them happen.

Cllr Nicky Hopwood, South Hams Executive Member for the Cost of Living, said: "This is a banded or graded scheme, which means the lower your income, the more pressures your household has, the greater the reduction you get.

"What we wanted to do with these proposals, was to recognise that some households needed to be able to earn more money and still get their Council Tax Reduction.

“At the lower end of the scheme, the reduction is already very generous. With these proposals, we wanted to provide a bit more support to those households in other parts of the scheme who do not already get as much support.

“I think that these proposals accurately reflect the squeeze that many households are feeling right now.”

Other proposed changes include change to the minimum income floor for self-employed people and tweaking the earnings disregard to make it easier for the council to administer the scheme and make it easier to understand for residents.

To take a look at the proposals and have your say visit:

www.engagement.southhams.gov.uk/council-tax-reduction

South Hams Support Interest for Investment Zone

South Hams District Council today agreed to support the submission of an Expressions of Interest for Investment Zone (IZ) status for the Plymouth and South Devon Freeport.

Investment Zone status would deepen and lengthen the economic benefits for businesses that locate within the three tax sites at Sherford, Langage and South Yard.

The Freeport Company will now submit an Expression of Interest to Government for Investment Zone status. More detail is expected to be released over the coming months about Investment Zones and how these will ‘supercharge’ existing Freeport tax sites and benefits to eligible businesses.

Cllr Judy Pearce, Leader of South Hams District Council, said: “The Freeport is a great opportunity to boost our economy and generate high skilled, high paid jobs in the region. Adding an Investment Zone status will only help to ensure that added benefits are secured as quickly as possible and for as long as possible.”

To read the full report, go to: www.southhams.gov.uk/Full-Council

Cost of Living – How South Hams Council is Responding

Next week, South Hams District Council’s Executive will consider a plan in direct response to the current cost of living challenges. A plan that could see quarter of a million pounds of support funding for families, supporting agencies and communities.

When South Hams District Council’s Executive next meet on the 13 October, they will be discussing a detailed plan for how the Council is responding to the current challenges posed by the increasing cost of living.

Cllr Nicky Hopwood, South Hams Executive Member for the Cost of Living said: “With this plan, we aim to ensure that every penny of support available to our residents can be accessed quickly and easily.

“We want our residents to have access to healthy nutritious food and a warm place to live, and in order to achieve this we recognise that many residents may need our help to navigate

the complexities of the support systems that are available. This is why we have created this plan, a plan which clearly lays out what we can do and how we intend to help our residents.

“I would also like to stress that we are not waiting for this plan to be approved by the Council, we have already started acting. We mobilized our work force and started acting as soon as the current challenge became apparent.

“What this plan does do however, it to put a framework around that action and ensure that we have considered all options. It also lays out where the funding is coming from and how we intend to work with partners.”

The District Council knows that it must work in collaboration with other agencies and partners to help residents find help and support. Through its emerging Cost of Living Response Plan, South Hams District Council is proposing a three pronged approach:

- 1) Providing direct support where they can, which is easy to access and provides a quick response to the needs of the communities.
- 2) Working with partners to support local communities and residents by making the best use of available funding and supporting project designed to combat the increase locally.
- 3) Signpost, share and promote existing support to those who need it most across the District.

In the plan, the Council is proposing to use funding that is available from the Discretionary Energy rebate Fund, the COVID-19 Hardship Fund and our share of DCC’s Clinically Vulnerable fund to put funding where it can have the most impact:

- £163,000 on an additional grant for families who receive a reduction in Council Tax.
- A £27,000 grant for communities so that they can support their most vulnerable residents with activities such as warm banks (warm places where people can come together rather than sit at home alone and cold.)
- A £25,000 grant for community wellbeing schemes such as those supporting mental health, isolation and other wider health and wellbeing activities.

The Council is also proposing that some of the available funding goes towards supporting some of those agencies already working in communities.

- £10,000 to the Citizen’s Advice,
- and, £14,000 to continuing an extension to the Money Advice Service.

Cllr Nicky Hopwood, South Hams’ Executive Member for Cost of Living, said: “It is also really important that we do what we can to de-stigmatise accessing help and support. Our residents need to know where they can get help and we will work closely with partners like Citizens Advice and CVS who are on the frontline of supporting our residents through this particularly challenging time.

“While Government have already taken some steps to reduce the impact of the cost of living increases, there is more we must do. We will also lobby Government on a number of issues.

“Through our action plan we can set out a series of key commitments. I will also ensure that the Council staff all work to deliver on them and ensure that our residents are supported.”

If you are currently looking for help or advice on the Cost of Living, here is the advice already available: www.southhams.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help

SIGN UP TO COST OF LIVING ADVICE E-BULLETIN: <https://bit.ly/3SNNkeu>

South Hams Partnership Pledge for Next Two Years

Every three years South Hams District Council reviews the money it awards to key local partners. This is to ensure that the money is being spent wisely and according to the terms of their agreement.

This October the Council’s Executive will once again review its funding arrangements and one of their key recommendations will be to pledge more money to South Hams Citizens Advice. An important decision when the cost of living is escalating and more people are looking for advice.

At the moment, the cost of living poses a significant challenge to all families and businesses, and South Hams District Council knows that working with partners has never been more important. Tackling the current challenge is not something that the Council can do alone and they intend to work closely with communities to get people the advice that they need.

While not all of the organisations on the list of key funding partners are involved in the cost of living crisis, the Council recognises the important role that they all play in South Hams. By continuing to pledge their support, the Council hopes that these organisations are able to continue their good work.

Cllr Jonathan Hawkins South Hams Lead Member for Communities, said: “South Hams District Council values its partnerships greatly, the work that many of these organisations do provides a truly important service to the public that the District Council simply could not.

“From heritage and culture to transport and advice, personally I would like to offer some of these organisations a lot more, but we have a finite pot of money and we need to spend it wisely.

“I would like to give my special thanks to Citizens Advice for the essential work they do for so many people and their families. I would like to thank in particular the volunteers who help support these groups, their time and knowledge is an essential part of this partnership. There will be an even greater need for their services this winter as people struggle to heat their homes and put food on the table.”

In its review of partnership funding, the District Council is proposing to maintain the grants to three partners, SW Museum Development Trust, Ivybridge Ring and Ride and South Hams CVS, they are then proposing to increase their contribution to Citizens Advice and the South Devon AONB for a further two years.

It is also recommended that the Council's officers enter discussions with Newton Abbot Community Transport to fully understand the contribution they make to residents within the District before finalising a decision on future funding.

Cllr Hawkins, added: "When the Executive meet on Thursday 13 October I will be proposing that we do not continue to fund Newton Abbott Community transport based on the application they submitted, but that we continue to work with them to understand how their service helps the residents of South Hams. This will help us understand if they can demonstrate a need for continued funding.

"We carry out these regular reviews to help us decide if the funding is being spent in the best interests of the residents of South Hams or if it could be spent better elsewhere. On this occasion, I feel that we need more information to decide if Newton Abbot Community Transport should continue to be funded."

You can listen into the meeting on the Executive on the 13 October live on YouTube at www.youtube.com/user/southhamscouncil to hear the Councillors discuss the partnership funding recommendations for the next two years and make their recommendations to Full Council.

Or you can read the full report at www.southhams.gov.uk/Executive

Cost of living help and guidance

Energy matters, financial support and support for your home

Improving Homes and Reducing Costs

With costs rising, now is the time to manage your costs and reduce your fuel bills, so we are here to help you with information and advice. We have set out a range of schemes and initiatives to help you manage your energy use more efficiently.

What Grants and Schemes are Available?

The Energy Company Obligation, this is where we facilitate grants from big energy companies to install a variety of measures, e.g. all types of insulation through to heating upgrades in eligible households.

South Dartmoor Community Energy offer free and impartial, independent advice from local advisers on how to reduce energy bills and help with heating to struggling households.

The Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) are what landlords are expected to comply with. Working with the South Dartmoor Community Energy, we identify rental properties that do not comply with the minimum energy efficiency standards. All rental properties must be rated E and above unless properly exempted. The landlords are given initial advice on how to get compliance with the regulations. Formal action will be taken against non-compliant landlords who are not willing to undertake the necessary work.

Energy Efficiency Loans can be offered by us for energy efficiency measures. This is through our loan partner, Lendology. They can also help households on oil, LPG and solid fuel to bulk-buy fuel with a 0% loan.

Under the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) Help to Heat local flexible eligibility, energy suppliers and installers will be able to offer grants, using our eligibility criteria. This allows them to install fully funded or subsidised energy saving measures for households, which have been declared eligible. We do not provide the funding; it is provided by the Energy Companies themselves.

All of the schemes and initiatives listed are subject to terms and conditions. In most cases, this would mean a gross household income of less than £31,000.

Solar

We do not recommend any particular installation company and you are advised that eligibility under the scheme may not necessarily result in a full grant.

A number of installers have however signed our Code of Practice to say how they will engage with house owners. This will always be in writing (or through social media).

There have some been worrying reports of people posing as our representatives knocking on doors and offering home energy improvements. This is NOT something that we would do.

If any company cold calls at your door, we strongly advise, you do NOT engage with them or allow them into your home.

If in doubt, please contact us at eco@swdevon.gov.uk to verify the installer is genuine.

Prepare for the Future - Insulation

It might not be possible to get these home improvements done before this winter. Many people will also be looking at their long-term fuel usage and planning for next year's winter.

With that in mind, residents are being urged to look at the schemes now to see if they are eligible and to start preparing for the future.

COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF)

Council in February 2022, Members approved to delegate the approval of a policy to administer the COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) Scheme, to the Council's rate relief panel.

The fund, totalling £1,684,710, was made available by Government to support businesses that have been affected by COVID-19, but have been ineligible for other business rates support.

Councils were responsible for developing and implementing a scheme based on local need, however we were unable to award relief to ratepayers who were entitled to Extended Retail

Discount (covering Retail, Hospitality and Leisure), the Nursery Discount or the Airport and Ground Operations Support Scheme. Relief can also not be given to unoccupied properties.

The Council has awarded rate relief totalling £1.61million to 509 business properties following a meeting of the Council's rate relief panel on 23 September. The amount of relief awarded is equivalent to 26% of the 2021/22 business rates liability, based on rateable value.

We have primarily been able to support businesses in the manufacturing, wholesale and supply chain sectors.

Ratepayers benefitting from relief will shortly receive a new bill with a covering letter explaining the terms of the award of the relief. As the relief must be applied to the 2021/22 business rates liability, most businesses will find that their account for 2021/2022 will go into credit. This will be transferred to the 2022/23 financial year thus reducing the amount of business rates payable. Should a ratepayer request that any credit be refunded, a refund will be raised.

As the relief is likely to amount to a subsidy, we need to ensure compliance with the UK's domestic and international subsidy control obligations. We will ask ratepayers, on a self-assessment basis, to inform us if they are in breach of any subsidy allowances.

In accordance with the Council's discretionary rate relief powers, all relief needed to be applied to business rates by 30 September 2022.

A report on the administration of the rate relief scheme will be presented to the Executive on 13 October 2022.

JLP Appeals Digest

The Appeals Digest contains a summary of some of the more useful and interesting appeal decisions that we have received across the JLP area between January and June 2022.

Appeal decisions provide an independent view of how our adopted planning policies can be applied, and can assist with how we consider future planning applications to ensure that we are making consistent and robust planning decisions.

Sextortion and Blackmail

Police are asking everyone to be vigilant against sextortion/blackmail scams after seeing an increase in reports.

Sextortion refers to when people send each other sexually explicit photos or videos and one of the parties threatens to share the content unless the other person pays them money, they may also threaten to share images with family and friends unless a fee is paid and ask for a set amount of money.

Even if you have mutual friends do not trust these people and please protect yourselves by not sharing images. This is taking place on all social media platforms and dating websites.

Do NOT pay any money, as the offender may request further payment.

For any concerns please phone 101, for more advice please see the Devon & Cornwall police website.

Linzi Berryman, Devon and Cornwall Police