

South Hams District Councillors Report to Parish Councils October 2024

1. There is an Overview & Scrutiny meeting this week with South West Water, details of the West Alvington issues have been provided to South Hams District Council.
2. South Hams Festival: Parish councils have been asked to consider the approval of a contribution of £500 funding towards the festival which is a the cross district event. The response to date has not been as positive as hoped, Cllr Dennis to provide updates as/when received.
3. South Hams District Council has launched a public consultation for their draft Local Cycling and Walking Plan (LCWIP). An LCWIP is put together with the aim of creating long-term networks and routes for everyday walking and cycling.
Would you like to cycle and walk more? What is stopping you from doing that right now? To learn more and comment on the public consultation please click the link:
<https://activetravelshwd.commonplace.is/>
4. There is an appeal notification for Brewery quay in Salcombe following the refusal of South Hams District Council to remove the Principal Residence condition. The hearing date is 26th November at Follaton House, this will not be streamed online.
5. The copper phone network is going to be retired January 2027, a drop-in session is being held on 30th October 10am – 1pm at Kingsbridge Library for anyone who would like more information.

6. Improving Council Services

A report was considered at a recent Executive meeting, outlining ongoing works to improve a core Council service this is the Community Services Team made up of 4 distinct areas: • Grounds Maintenance • Localities Service • Property Services • Parking

Grounds Maintenance

There is a fundamental review of the operation of the Grounds Maintenance service. The review includes: • Review of current schedules and mapping. • Comparing current workload against current resource. • Provide the ability for the public to know when grass areas are due to be cut via the website. • Review of work undertaken for 3rd parties for example Parish and Town Councils • Review of rewilding areas • Review of inhouse tree maintenance team • Ability to align the service more closely with the street cleansing service • Review of equipment and replacement programme • Review of current depots and locations

Property Services

The team has a substantial number of skilled roles but over the course of time, it has become increasingly difficult to retain and attract staff to the team, primarily due to the abundance of building and contractor work in the South Hams. To build capacity and resilience, the service has developed an apprenticeship scheme that provides a development pathway for young people to gain skills that would also be transferrable to the private sector and therefore contribute to the wider South Hams economy. Three apprentices have been recruited in partnership with a local college and started in these roles in August.

Currently District Council public toilet repairs and the management of District Council public toilets are within the Community Services team. The toilet cleaning staff are currently part of the Waste Services Team. A decision was made to move the cleaning teams into the Property Services team from September. This will mean all decisions relating to public toilets are within the same service.

A review of the service is looking at several areas including:

- The Planned Property maintenance programme for all Council buildings and assets which the service maintains.
- Review of the resources required to complete planned and responsive maintenance.
- Ability for the service to undertake work for third parties such as Parish and Town Councils.

Localities Service

The service patrols the South Hams carrying out a wide range of operational activity within the community. The Localities service provide 7-days a week cover.

Key tasks include the following: • Play Park inspections • Litter picking • Dog patrols • Toilet & Street Cleaning Inspections • Fly tip investigations and removal • Management of markets • Attending environmental nuisance / planning enforcement complaints to gather evidence for the professional officers to assess • Customer visits to help vulnerable residents complete financial assistance claim forms • Private water supply quality testing • Erecting & Removing planning notices • Shellfish testing.

The Service is reviewing what and how it works, the allocated work is now on area-based routes to increase efficiency and allows Localities Officers to get ownership and build relationships in their patch, which we know works.

Street Scene Environmental Enforcement (Fly Tipping, Littering, Fly Posting, Graffiti and Dog Fouling)

The Localities team is responsible for the enforcement of Street Scene environmental offences including Fly Tipping, Littering, Fly Posting, Graffiti and Dog Fouling.

There have been new policies and procedures adopted which will ensure compliance with reporting environmental complaints to central government. All Locality Officers and Civil Enforcement Officers (parking) will be trained and authorised to collect evidence and recommend Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) for offences, and body cams will be used to support this. There are changes underway as well in the handling of Abandoned vehicles to speed up the process, also joint working with other Devon Councils.

We as District Councillors have been demanding a schedule of street sweeping works to be provided to us and local town and parish councils. Part of the change and improvements mean the street sweeping function is in the process of being transferred from the Waste and Recycling Service to Community Services. Upon transfer, council officers have committed to both developing a schedule of works and providing a joined-up sequential approach to grass cutting, litter picking and street sweeping.

7. An update on second homes, self-catering accommodation and tax vs rates

As part of the preparation work for the introduction of a 100% Council Tax Second Homes Premium from 1 April 2025, letters will be sent out to all properties where records indicate the property is a second home for Council Tax purposes. Due to the volume, this will be staggered over the next few weeks.

The letter will ask for the completion of a short online form confirming that the property remains a second home. In the event of the form not being completed, follow up action will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Self-catering accommodation

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) has written to customers who have not responded to requests for information about their self-catering property. They were asked to complete the 'Application for business rates for self-catering properties' and return it by 27 September 2024.

Failure to respond will result in properties being moved from business rates to Council Tax. If a property no longer meets the self-catering criteria for business rates, the alteration to both the Valuation List and Rating List will be effective from 1 April 2023.

Council Tax or Business Rates?

Whether a property is business rated or subject to Council Tax is not a choice of the Council or the taxpayer, but based on the factual use of the property. This is decided by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA).

For a property to be business rated rather than subject to Council Tax, it must be both available to let for 140 days or more and be actually let as short-term holiday accommodation for at least 70 days in the previous 12 months. The availability and lettings must be on a commercial basis.

8. Home energy efficiency upgrades

As part of the Councils work to improve the energy efficiency of homes and fight climate change, SHDC are working with partners South Dartmoor Community Energy to help future-proof some of the most poorly performing energy rated properties in the South Hams.

Residents could save on their energy use and bills with a free energy efficiency upgrade to their property if they:

- Own their home
- Have heating that isn't main's gas
- Have an energy EPC rating of D, E, F, G
- Have a total household income of less than £36,000 per year

Please encourage eligible residents to find out more and apply at southhams.gov.uk/hug2