• Transformation – County has started to redesign and refocus its way of working under a ‘Transforming SCC to Improve Lives’ programme. It is an inspiring new programme of work that will see the council reprioritise everything it does and change many of the ways in which it works. It has a number of main themes. The first is about prevention – the idea being to prevent demand coming forward and work earlier with communities so that people can live better more fulfilled lives. The second theme is focusing on commissioning, so that we can design better services for the future. The third is all about digital transformation, which will change the way the council provides services and interacts with customers. The chief executive is keen that people understand this is not a traditional restructuring of the council but is about the same people doing things differently and being more proactive rather than delivering a reactive service.

• Climate change emergency – County council agreed to declare a climate change emergency in Somerset and to try to be carbon neutral by 2030. It 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 by contractors Alun Griffiths (Contractors) Ltd. The contractors have held two drop-in sessions for people to meet them and ask any questions. They are also employing a community liaison person to be a point of contact and keep everybody informed of progress and issues. The county’s officers are also meeting 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.

• Broadband – A briefing has finally been issued on Connecting Devon and Somerset/Gigaclear. Bottom line is that nothing has been decided yet as to whether Gigaclear can deliver what it now says it wants to do by 2022 so more time is needed to assess the proposals. CDS say they need more assurances from Gigaclear and have told them that they won’t wait indefinitely – but have not said how long they will wait. There is some indication from Government that funding will be extended to 2023 – which makes me think that Gigaclear won’t deliver by 2022.

• Flooding – A new website has been launched for reporting incidents of flooding of properties past and present. The county chas a duty to keep a record of any flooding which happens in Somerset. This information helps communities receive professional advice and provides much evidence to support funding applications for a wide range of flood mitigation measures, to help reduce flood risks. Property-related flooding can now easily be reported whether it is historical or current. You can upload supporting evidence, such as videos and photographs. The site is <https://swim.geowessex.com/somerset>. It is soon going to be rebranded as ‘FORT’ -Flood Online Reporting Tool.

• Adults with Learning Difficulties – A monthly peer support group has just been started in Taunton Library. It is being 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.

• 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 7th May, and the awards ceremony is Thursday 4th 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.