

## **Monthly Report from County Councillors for Curry Rivel & Langport Division End of July 2022**

### **Local Government Reorganisation**

Council has appointed Duncan Sharkey as Chief Executive of Somerset County Council, then the new Somerset Council from April next year. So the necessary leadership is in place to press forward our work developing the new Council ready to deliver services from 1st April 2023.

The newly-constituted Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Implementation Board held its first meeting on Friday 29<sup>th</sup>: plans and timetables for meeting our 1<sup>st</sup> April deadline were approved.

### **Local Community Networks**

Our plan for developing the new Local Community Networks (LCNs) was approved. Having inherited the previous administration's 'business case', we are working to ensure LCNs support our vision of a fairer, greener, more flourishing Somerset. These LCNs are set to be treated as Committees of the Council, meaning they'll be given specific decision-making powers and influence. Three LCN pilots (Exmoor, Frome and South East Somerset) continue to progress; learning from those is being fed back into the development programme.

The timeline for LCN development is:

- Consider the role, geographies, governance and funding of LCNs – July 2022
- Refine governance & financial modelling, Medium Term Financial Planning - July to September 2022.
- Engage and consult on geographies for LCNs – Autumn 2022
- Publish a formal Decision Paper including a resourcing plan - November 2022

We are clear that LCNs must be effective, affordable, sustainable and actively involve local communities.

### **Support for Somerset households with food and energy bills**

Somerset residents struggling to pay their bills could be eligible for support with the cost of food, energy, water and other essentials like fridges, freezers and cookers over the coming months. The County Council is distributing £3.8m before 30th September through the Household Support Fund. To apply, visit the Somerset County Council website and search 'Household Support Fund' online or call 0300 123 2224 and the Council will find an organisation who will support families to make an application.

### **Council Finance Update**

Inflation is hitting the County Council hard, as it is everyone and every local council in the country. Pay awards, energy costs, building costs are all increasing fast, so the budget approved by the previous County Councillors in February is already way out-of-date. As ever, demand for our services – care for the elderly and infirm, for children, highways, education – is increasing. And the 'unitary bonus' saving of £18.5m annually envisaged by those who decided on a single unitary council looks increasingly unlikely to be realised. The situation is being monitored closely: we'll keep you updated.

### **Cost of Living Emergency Declared**

A resolution was made by Council on 20<sup>th</sup> July calling on government to immediately reduce VAT to 17.5% for 12 months (saving the average Somerset household £600 this year), to re-introduce the pensions triple lock and to restore the Universal Credit supplement of £20. And joint local councils are calling for a Cost of Living Summit to bring together local businesses, charities and MPs to share experiences & ideas to tackle the crisis.

### **Ecological Emergency Declared**

An Ecological Emergency resolution reaffirmed the council's commitment to ensuring that 'tackling the climate and nature emergencies' policies are at the heart of everything the council does and are embedded into its decision-making processes. The resolution also sets out a plan to ensure that across the county biodiversity is improved, environments enriched and the destruction of habitats is resisted when development occurs. It also highlights the Council's role as a Lead Partner in delivering a strategy with a set of clear actions to bring about a reversal of the negative impacts on the natural environment and biodiversity whilst also mitigating against the possibility of further decline or damage on the habitats, flora and fauna of Somerset.

### **Children and young people help shape the new Children and Young People's Plan for Somerset**

A Children & Young People's Plan has been co-produced by the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership with children and young people, the County Council, the Police and the NHS. It provides clear direction and enables everyone to work better together on shared priorities to make essential changes to improve outcomes for children, young people and families in Somerset.

All councillors are being trained in Corporate Parenting, because we are all legally responsible for the welfare of young people & children in the care of the county.

### **Local Public Transport**

The changes to the bus timetables made by First Group have caused some distress, especially in our division. We are pleased to say that working with First Group has resulted in their understanding of some of our concerns. As of Monday 1st August, the college holiday timetable should revert to the termtime college timetable in the morning so that a connection can be made to get to Yeovil before 9.00am (the 55 service will go from Fivehead at 0836, Curry Rivel at 0742, Langport car park 0746, Huish Episcopi school 0757, Pitney Halfway House 0800 arriving at Somerton Market place for 0806 changing onto the 77 service at 0811 for Yeovil arriving at the bus station at 0845)

We are still concerned about the reliability of the connections (buses being late causing missed changes) so an option to reinstate the 54 service as a direct route to Yeovil is being looked into by First Group, although it may result in a lower frequency than is currently possible with the Somerton connection.

**Cllr Mike Stanton** has been elected Chair of the Somerset Rivers Authority after three years as a Board member. The Rivers Authority was set up after the 2014 floods to invest in flood prevention and resilience development. It will be working on revamping its Flood Action Plan over the coming months. The SRA's Annual Report is published this week: <https://www.somersetiversauthority.org.uk/>

**Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP)** won the top award for its Recycle More service at the Local Government Chronicle Awards.

**Foster Care:** our foster carer recruitment campaign, Theo's Story, was highly commended in the Campaign of the Year category.

**Apprenticeships:** our County Council has been nominated as one of only three local authorities in the Department of Education's Top 100 Apprentice Employers. And our Somerset Centre for Integrated Learning (SCIL) received a 'Good in all Aspects' Ofsted report following their May inspection.

**Electric Minibuses:** the council has purchased two of these, adapted for wheelchair use, for young people and children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), initially for the Bridgwater area, but for later expansion across the county.

**Mike Stanton & Richard Wilkins, 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022**