

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT FOR RODE PARISH COUNCIL, MARCH 2023

By Adam Boyden, Somerset County Councillor for Frome North

Local Government Reorganisation

The last few weeks have seen the final ever Full Council meetings of both Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council, quite historic events. The new unitary Somerset Council will form on 1st April, when the 110 current Somerset County Councillors elected in May 2022 will form the new Somerset Council. An incredible amount of work continues behind the scenes to get everything in place.

There will be a single phone number and website for the new council to access all council services, announced just before Vesting Day. People will also still be able to access the new council's services in person (and supported to access services online) at the Council Access Point in Frome Library.

Somerset CC approved the new Somerset Council's **budget**, the "most difficult budget setting any of us can remember" – see <https://somersetnewsroom.com/2023/02/22/budget-approved-for-new-somerset-council/> and further links [here](#).

The new **Constitution**, the legal cornerstone of the new unitary council, was also approved. The ten-part document, over 500 pages, sets out the new council's commitment to public participation in its meetings, makes sure that the council meets its legal duties and supports decision-making and governance – see <https://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk/new-constitution-strategic-with-a-local-focus/> and [here](#).

The new **planning** arrangements involve one Strategic Planning Committee and four area-based Planning Committees (Somerset East will cover the Mendip district). Several issues were raised with the initial proposals at meetings of the Constitution & Governance Committee, but were all addressed in the final agreed proposals, see [here](#) for details.

The new adopted **Council Plan** highlights four key priorities for Somerset Council: a Greener, More Sustainable Somerset; a Healthy and Caring Somerset; a Fairer, Ambitious Somerset; and a Flourishing and Resilient Somerset. A further Business Plan will be developed in the coming months. See <https://somersetnewsroom.com/2023/03/01/one-month-out-council-plan-sets-priorities-for-new-somerset-council/>

To disperse power away from the new larger council, 18 new '**Local Community Networks**' will be formed, informal partnerships (not formal committees) to focus on solving local problems and improving our part of Somerset. The Frome LCN includes 18 parishes, and parish councillors will be members. The next meeting of the 'pilot' Frome LCN is on Tuesday 28th March at 7pm in Frome Town Hall and online. This needs local involvement to make it work. See <https://adamboyden.mycouncillor.org.uk/2023/02/08/local-community-networks/> for details.

An expert team from the Local Government Association (LGA) has commended work to create a new unitary council, and concluded that 'everything is in place to ensure that Somerset Council will be a safe and legally functioning body from day 1, assuming the current progress and leadership is maintained' - <https://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk/somerset-unitary-plan-praised-by-local-government-association/>

A calendar of meetings, Committee places and membership of outside bodies were also agreed on 1st March. I will sit on the Planning Committee for Somerset East (which takes

over from the MDC Planning Board), and will Vice-Chair the Climate & Place Scrutiny Committee.

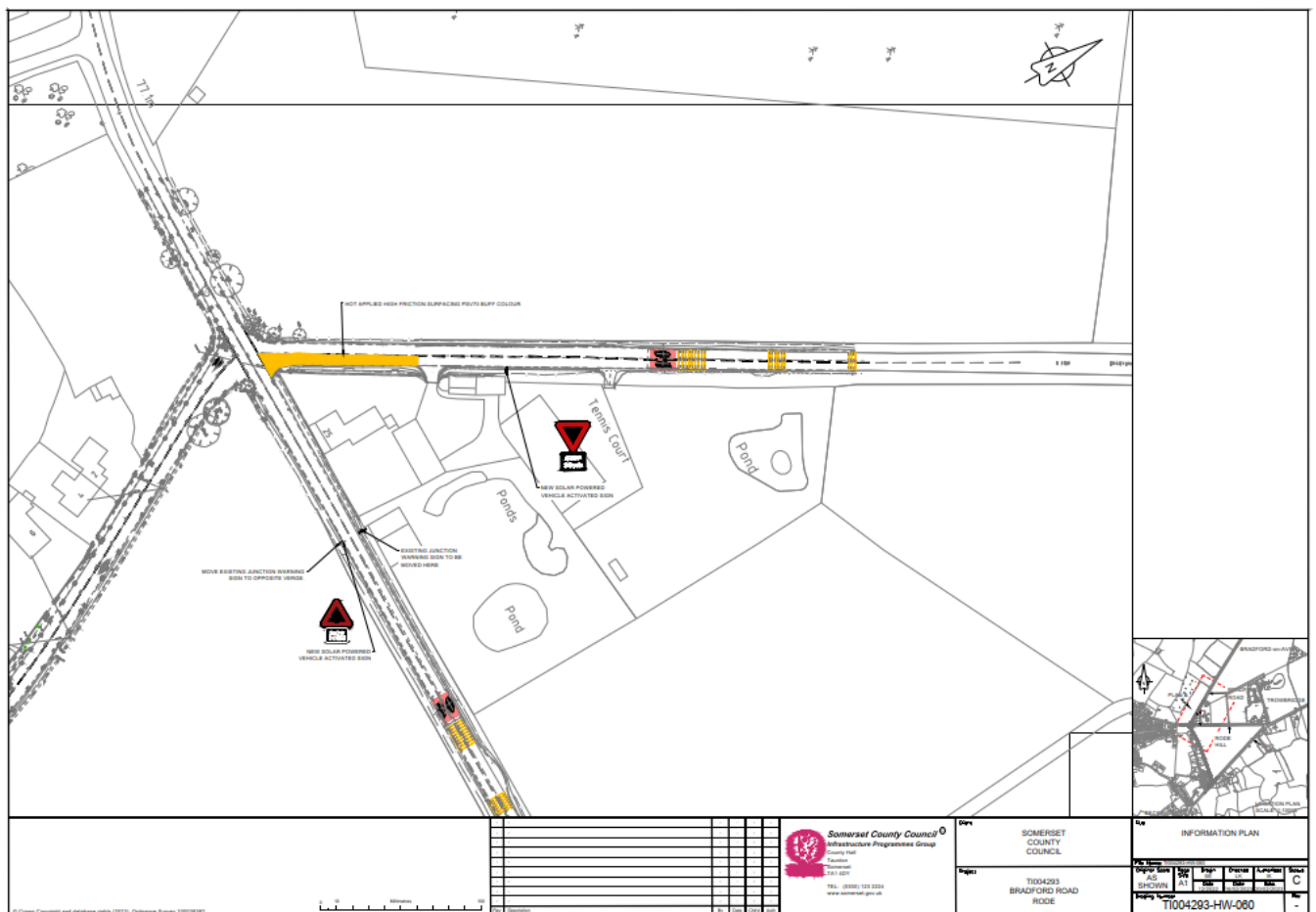
Planning consultation

There is also a consultation on the new Statement of Community Involvement - how Somerset Council will involve and consult local communities in preparing planning policy documents and in determining planning applications, until **16th March** – please see <https://somerset.inconsult.uk/sci/consultationHome>.

Rode roads

The Glasdon gates, village name plates and terminal signs, the TRO for the 30mph extension and the 20mph speed limit, should be on track, but please let us know if there are any current concerns.

We heard back from Kerry Jones, Somerset County Council’s service manager for engineering projects and programmes, on Weds 1st March with a plan of proposed works for the Rode Hill/ Bradford Rd crossroads (see below), to finalise the Small Improvement Scheme there. Quotes have been requested for the Vehicle activated signs, and the date of the works is to be confirmed. I asked that the parish council be kept informed.



Walking, cycling and buses

Somerset County Council has just been awarded more than £410k from Active Travel England's Capability and Ambition Fund, to support its aim of making streets more cycling, walking and wheeling-friendly. The funds will be used to support capacity building and behaviour change, see <https://somersexnewsroom.com/2023/03/10/council-nets-over-400000-to-support-active-travel-initiatives/>

SCC is starting to prepare its Local Transport Plan (LTP), and is encouraging people to feed back ideas and concerns on transport in rural communities - <https://somersexnewsroom.com/2023/02/24/council-wants-your-feedback-on-transport-in-rural-communities/>

The Place Scrutiny Committee also recently considered how the County Council can promote active travel, including through local cycling and walking improvement plans (LCWIPs), promoting Frome as an Active Travel Town, and bids for Government funding. LCWIPs currently being prepared in Frome and Beckington will form part of the LTP - <https://democracy.somersex.gov.uk/documents/s26434/Active%20Travel%20Scrutiny%20Presentation.pdf>.

It is really good to see the extension of the Bus Recovery Grant for another six months, which secures the D2 evening and Sunday services, and an extension to SCC's £2 bus fare scheme. A new fast D2X Frome-Bath bus service will use the A36 between Beckington and Bath, increasing the capacity of the D2 buses also coming through Norton St Philip and Rode.

Cancellations and disruption to timetables hitting bus routes across Somerset have been flagged with the region's main operator by the County Council's lead for transport cllr Mike Rigby - <https://somersexnewsroom.com/2023/03/09/councils-transport-lead-voices-frustration-over-disruption-to-bus-services-in-somersex/>

Eco-friendly street lighting

Work is underway to replace conventional street lighting with more energy efficient LED equipment across key towns - see <https://somersexnewsroom.com/2023/02/22/council-focuses-on-the-bright-side-of-the-road-with-eco-friendly-lighting/>

Environment Scrutiny

The Environment Scrutiny Committee on 28th February considered an update on the flexible plastic recycling pilot project, work towards a Local Energy Plan for Somerset, and governance of the work to address the climate emergency – see reports here <https://democracy.somersex.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=445&MId=1661&Ver=4>. The next meeting on 29th March will scrutinise a Tree Strategy for Somerset and the Nutrients Management (phosphates) task & finish group's early findings.

Green & Healthy Frome wins Lottery funding

The Green & Healthy Frome partnership (Edventure Frome, Frome Medical Practice and Frome Town Council) has been successful in its bid for nearly £1.7m funding from the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund, to expand and deliver a number of pioneering projects which promote people's health and wellbeing, and reduce carbon emissions in Frome over the next three years – see <https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/its-a-big-win-for-the-town-lottery-funding-success-for-a-green-healthy-frome/>.

Cost of living help

A new leaflet has been produced by the Somerset councils to help people find help with the cost of living and direct people to sources of advice – please see <https://adamboyden.mycouncillor.org.uk/2023/02/27/cost-of-living-support/> and get in touch if you would like some to distribute locally.

Increasing Citizens Advice services

A Key Decision has been taken by the SCC Executive Lead Member for Public Health, Equalities and Diversity (cllr Adam Dance) to increase funding for Citizens Advice services in response to Cost of Living Crisis, by approving a grant of approximately £199,000 from the Government's Covid Clinically Extremely Vulnerable funding. This will support a fixed term advice response team through Somerset's five local Citizens Advice branches, operating at community level with extended opening hours to offer evening access; see: <https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=2693>.

Acquiring Homes for Looked After Children

A Key Decision has been made by the SCC Lead Members for Children and Families (cllr Tessa Munt) and for Development and Assets (cllr Ros Wyke), to pursue the purchase of suitable children's homes across the county for children looked after by the Council as their Corporate Parent, up to a value of £3.4m. The Council currently purchases a large number of placements from external providers, so the development of an in-house estate aims to increase the capacity to provide local homes and better outcomes for looked after children, reduce reliance on external (sometimes distant) provision, and provide value for money; see <https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=2695>

Supporting refugees

Somerset County Council marked a year since Russia's brutal invasion and called for more sponsors to come forward under the Homes for Ukraine scheme - <https://somersetnewsroom.com/2023/02/22/somerset-marks-one-year-since-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

I attended the Ukrainian cultural awareness session in Frome, which was very moving. Some 1,417 Ukrainian guests have arrived safely in Somerset through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, hosted by 745 Somerset individuals, with over 250 going on to live independently. There are also currently 6 resettled Afghan families in the Somerset County Council area, evacuated from Afghanistan in 2021. SCC has pledged to support a further 10 families in the next 14 months.

As some of these hosting arrangements come to an end, homes are now needed for moving refugees into private accommodation. If you're a landlord, you could receive a one-off payment of up to £4000 by providing a home for a Ukrainian family – find out more here <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/article/11292/Cash-incentives-for-landlords-who-help-house-Ukrainian-refugees>. Any private landlords who have vacant, or soon-to-be vacant, properties for rent, are encouraged to contact housing.admin@mendip.gov.uk or phone 0300 303 8588. Please see www.somerset.gov.uk/Ukraine about support currently available, and <https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/your-community/frome-refugee-support-hub/> for the Frome refugee support hub.

SCC's next Executive meeting on 15th March will also consider allowing the District Councils to enter into agreements with the Government and use Government funding to obtain and refurbish 31 properties to deliver additional housing in support of the Ukrainian

and Afghan refugee resettlement schemes, for those unable to secure their own accommodation – see item 7 reports here:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=433&MIId=1738&Ver=4>.

Debate Not Hate

The new council will take a zero-tolerance approach to any abuse of councillors or officers, and has pledged to uphold exemplary standards of public and political debate:

<https://somersexnewsroom.com/2023/03/01/debate-not-hate-council-supports-bid-to-tackle-abuse-and-intimidation-against-councillors/>

Other Somerset County Council news

see <https://somersexnewsroom.com/> and <https://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk/news/>

Please let me know if there is anything I can help with or if you have any queries.

Best wishes,

Adam Boyden

Somerset County Councillor for Frome North and Mendip District Councillor for Frome College ward

Mobile: 07809 284817

Email: adam.boyden@somerset.gov.uk

Web: <https://adamboyden.mycouncillor.org.uk/>