

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL
Report by Sue Osborne
JULY 2022

Local Government Reorganisation: Following the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) decision to support the move to a single Unitary Council across Somerset, vesting day for the new Unitary Council remains as 1st April 2023.

*A press release has been issued giving further details of proposals for Local Community Networks (LCNs)

*A regular briefing note on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) will soon be provided for Town and Parish Councils.

*Currently, There are fortnightly Wednesday Conference calls on LGR available for Parish/Town Council Clerks. Contact Rachael Robertson RRobertson@somerset.gov.uk if you wish to be included.

Recruitment of new Chief Executive: Following an extensive recruitment campaign, a new Chief Executive Duncan Sharkey, currently CEO of Windsor and Maidenhead Council has now been recommended to the 20th July Full Council for approval.

Somerset's Integrated Care Board: Changes to legislation passed earlier this year (The Health and Care Act 2022) created 42 Integrated Care Systems across the Country including a 'single footprint' organisation for Somerset. The new system came into operation on 1st July with the creation of the Somerset Integrated Care Board (ICB). The Somerset ICB replaces the Clinical Commissioning Group and brings together providers from Yeovil District Hospital, Musgrove Park Hospital, the County Council, Primary Care and the Voluntary sector. This new Board will be fundamental in commissioning services from the main health providers across the County.

Financial position: Just two months into the new Administration at County Hall the latest figures published by the County Council shows a potential £14.4 million overspend for the current financial year if action is not taken to limit spending. In addition, papers show that whilst officers had previously identified the need to make some savings for the new council, inflation and demand for services have now substantially increased the budget gap to £44 million. An urgent review of spend and tightening of budgets will be necessary.

Arts and Culture strategy: Arts and culture across Somerset are set to benefit from the creation of a Somerset Cultural Strategy which will cost up to £30,000 to create. The project will consider how to raise awareness and promote the role that culture and creativity can play in enriching communities and improving the quality of life,

health, wellbeing and the local economy for Somerset residents, local businesses and visitors.

Food and energy bills support: Somerset residents who are struggling to pay the bills could be eligible for support with the cost of food, energy, water, and other essentials over the coming months. Somerset County Council will distribute £3.8m before September 30th as part of the Household Support Fund. Just over £1.2m will be used during the school holidays to provide food vouchers worth £10 a week to children eligible for Free School Meals and a further £1.3m will be used for one-off payments of £100 to residents on Pension Credit. Another £1m will be made available for a range of urgent essentials including fuel, food, and white goods. A total of £200,000 is put aside to help support people who can't access the internet or online vouchers. For more information, visit: www.somerset.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/somerset-household-support-fund

SEND Services Consultation: Somerset County Council, NHS Somerset ICB and Somerset Parent Carer Forum are keen to hear from children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), their families, professionals and health colleagues to help shape Somerset's SEND services going forward. Anyone who has been in contact with Somerset SEND services (for whatever reason) over the past year is invited to share their views and experiences in the annual SEND survey. The anonymous survey runs until Monday 19 September and can be found here: www.somerset.gov.uk/annualsendsurvey .

Financial Wellbeing: A new Somerset Financial Wellbeing project is being launched to support people concerned about money and help them to plan for a better financial future. Working with several national and local charities and organisations that offer expert and confidential help, the scheme aims to provide free information, events, and training to both residents and employees of Somerset businesses who may be facing financial anxiety caused by the cost-of-living increases, the aftermath of Covid-19, or because they are facing a change in circumstances.

Road safety and horse riders: Somerset County Council's Road Safety Team has teamed up with The British Horse Society (BHS) to highlight potential safety issues faced by equestrians on Somerset roads. With an increasing number of reported incidents involving horses and vehicles, the campaign is designed to better educate road users on how to pass horses safely and encouraging them to adhere to the BHS's Dead Slow behavioural change messages:

1. Slow down to a maximum of 10mph
2. Be patient, do not sound your horn or rev your engine
3. Pass the horse wide and slow, at least two metres if possible
4. Drive slowly away.

Grass Cutting and Surface Dressing: SCC's Highways Team have started work on two summer highways maintenance programmes covering verges and road surfaces. Each year more than 9,400km of roadside verge is cut. As a balance must be found between promoting habitat creation and protecting wildlife, and the overall road safety of all road users most highway verges are only cut to a width of one metre though some stretches can be cut back beyond this width if there is a need to improve visibility for motorists at specific junctions. Cutting is due to be completed in September. SCC have also begun surface dressing more than 100 roads. The 2022 programme, including maps are at www.travelsomerset.co.uk/grass-cutting and progress on works dates via Travel Somerset

Ukrainian refugees: For full information and more details on actions around refugees can be found at www.somerset.gov.uk/ukraine/refugee-resettlement/