

Monthly report from County Councillors for Curry Rivel & Langport Division

End June 2022

Local Government Reorganisation: With just 190 working days before the new unitary council comes into being on 1 April 2023, the first priority of the new administration has been to understand how this is progressing. Not surprisingly, there are significant challenges and critical financial pressures ahead. Selection of a new Chief Executive is happening now, with an appointment expected after 20th July. Migration of council systems to a single IT platform is now planned, to be done in phases before 1st April 2023.

Financial situation: This is frankly worrying: inflation is hitting us 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costs are all increasing fast, so the budget approved by the previous administration in February is already way out-of-date.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.

Local Community Networks (LCNs): these were proposed in the case for a single unitary authority as a way of involving our communities more in our work – something we also wish for. However, the plans made before May for them need substantial revision, not least because they do not include the matter of most concern to localities, namely planning. And, surprisingly, no budget provision was made for establishing and staffing them. The two pilot LCN projects are now ending, so we will draw on the learning from those in redesigning them.

Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP): Garden Waste (Green bin): most subscriptions expire this week, so check that you’ve renewed – reminders seem not to have arrived with everyone: somersetwaste.gov.uk

Somerset’s recycling rate is at an all-time high at 56% - well done everyone. We expect to be in the top 10% nationally when figures come out later in the year.

County **Reuse Week** is 16-23 July: somersetwaste.gov.uk/reuse-week

Census: The first results of the 2021 national Census came out this week. Somerset’s population has increased by 7.3% to 575,600, compared with a national average of 6.6%. 25% of our population is aged 65 or over, compared with 18% nationally: this puts greater pressure on our Adult Care Services than other parts of the country.

Grass cutting and surface dressing: this is underway – nearly 6,000 miles of roadside verge will be cut between now and September, up to one metre width except where more is needed for visibility at junctions. Some verges are being left uncut, to improve biodiversity.

Glastonbury 2022 has been a success – but are people aware of the work of the county’s Public Health team? They have to cover a population the size of Swindon, ensuring water quality, waste management, food hygiene, noise levels, traffic management & crowd control.

Buses: bus operators have cut timetables on several routes in the county: we have no control over this, but are campaigning for improvement.

Climate change: Somerset Climate Action Network are hosting a webinar on Tuesday July 5th at 7:30 pm for parishes which are thinking of declaring a Climate Emergency or have done so.

What we’re working on: Richard on cycle path improvement and roadside verge clearing; Mike on Adult Social Care as Associate Lead for that department.

Council Meeting: our next full meeting will be on 20th July at the Westland Centre, Yeovil.

Mike Stanton & Richard Wilkins 30th June 2022