

SOMERSET COUNCIL

Frome Town Council

Cllr Dawn Denton

JULY 2023

Somerset Press Releases: You can view all the Somerset County Council press releases for the last month using this link:

<https://somersetnewsroom.com/category/press-releases/>

Taxing Questions for Library Service (featured in Somerset Confidential): Mr Simon McKie, based in Rudge, raised his concern with me about the Oxford University Press suite being removed from Somerset libraries. He asked the question at full council in June as a request to reinstate it. You can read the article here:

<https://levellerconfidential.substack.com/p/taxing-questions-for-library-service>

Berkley School: I met with Mrs Suzanne Thompson (Head of Berkley School) to get an overview of her vision for the future of the school. David Warburton was working on this before he resigned, so this will have to be something I raise with our new MP after 20th July. In accordance with the S106, the First School notice has been served (which was confirmed by Tessa Hampden on 26.06.2023). But everyone else is using language like 'ifs and buts', which is not helpful. At this stage, using the data we currently have, a new school at Edmund Park will not be viable as we would need to raise £7-8m for up to 210 places and for 420-place school £11m+ from the DfE. But, with the developments being approved around Frome, and the restructuring of the school system across the county, this could work in favour of a new school at Edmund Park. I continue to work on this.

Scrutiny of Communities: At the June Scrutiny for Communities meeting, I requested full reports from the Somerset Council of the following:

- Street cleaning contracts
- GRT community
- Libraries and outreach vehicles
- Leisure centre parking
- Heritage assets
- Tourism facilities
- Fairs and markets

I will be able to assess how we can propose to take these topics forward as a community, LCN or council in the Frome area.

Council Tax Discounts: I have been referred to Steve Shrimplin who is responsible for council tax in the East Somerset area. He is currently on leave so I will update on email (and include Anne Hills and Lenka Grimes) as soon as I hear back from him.

Flies at in Frome North: Cllr Adam Boyden, Cllr Steve Tanner, residents and I met with the regional director, scientists and customer service manager of Wessex Water. The trials are going well, and the flies seem to have reduced by about 80%. They will be issuing a full report of their findings this summer, which will be made public.

Three-year Council Finances: When the 2023/24 budget was agreed in February 2023 the forecast gap over the next three years was outlined as £100m. However, the latest Executive report states that the expected gap for 2024/25 of circa £40m will now be considerably higher. The report also states that it is imperative that action be taken to identify significant savings. The same Executive report also shows an accumulative budget gap of £98.8m in 2026/27.

Waste Services Industrial Action: The council was informed this week that Waste Service members of the Unite union intend to start industrial action on Wednesday 12 July. Though all efforts would be made to limit the impact, industrial action is likely to cause widespread and significant disruption affecting the majority of residents in some way. The staff intend to strike Wednesday to Friday each week in the four weeks from 12 July to 4 August. On the other days of the week staff taking action would not work overtime or be involved in catch-up collections, for example on Saturdays. Three-weekly refuse collections would be prioritised, along with clinical waste collections and collections from communal locations. However, there is no guarantee that these collections will take place on time. Recycling collections would be affected to a much greater extent as their crews are redeployed to support the other collections. The scheduling of the industrial action means some residents could go multiple weeks without recycling collections.

Customer Access Points: Customers who need in-person help or advice from Somerset Council will find support at all Somerset Libraries. From July, they will be able to set up virtual, face-to-face meetings on the spot so people can speak directly to a member of the Customer Service team. Customer Access Points were initially set up in seven libraries in April when Somerset Council, now after a successful trial, it is being extended to all Somerset's libraries. The support will be provided during library opening hours, which, in most cases, includes weekends.

Surface dressing programme: The Highways team have started to surface dress some roads as part of the summer maintenance programme. Surface dressing is a recognised maintenance technique for sealing a road, improving skid resistance, and preventing water getting under the surface. The work can only be carried out in dry weather, so the Council's surface dressing programme is flexible, and dates can change at short notice. You can check which roads are being surface dressed here: www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/surface-dressing/.

Summer reading challenge: Youngsters aged 4-11 can join the Summer Reading Challenge by visiting Somerset Libraries. The Challenge themed around the power of play, sport, games, and physical activity offers free materials from Somerset Libraries and online via the Challenge website. The characters – brought to life by children’s author and illustrator Loretta Schauer – navigate a fictional summer obstacle course and track their reading as they go, rewarded by free incentives including stickers.

National award for Children’s Services: Somerset Council is celebrating after winning a prestigious Award for a partnership project delivering children’s homes across the county. The Council and its partners – care providers Homes2Inspire (part of national charity, Shaw Trust) and Somerset NHS Foundation Trust – won the ‘Innovation in Partnerships’ category for their trailblazing Homes and Horizons project. The project, which was developed and introduced under the previous Conservative administration is delivering 10 family-sized homes for children as part of a new model of care for Somerset’s most vulnerable young people. It will also provide 20 specialist foster carers and a brand-new, therapeutic education service on two sites within the county, designed to increase young people’s life chances through better educational results and improved mental health and wellbeing.

Best wishes for a lovely summer,

Dawn Denton