

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT FOR FROME TOWN COUNCIL, 19 APRIL 2023 By Adam Boyden, Somerset Councillor for Frome North

A new Somerset Council



The main news this month is that 1st April was 'vesting day' for the new Somerset Council, a 'unitary authority' that has taken over all services from the district and county councils, including housing, social care, planning, highways, education, public health, recycling and waste, and much more. That means no more Mendip District Council, or Somerset County Council.

To access council services there is now a single website www.somerset.gov.uk and a single telephone number **0300 123 2224** (open from 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday), and Council Access Points across the county, including in Frome Library.

Frome is now served by 6 (2 each in North, East and West divisions) of the 110 Somerset Councillors who were elected as county councillors last May (with 61 Lib Dems forming the new administration, taking over from the Conservatives). This is the biggest shake up of local government in Somerset for 50 years, and Somerset Council is now one of the largest unitary councils in England, with a population of 545,000.

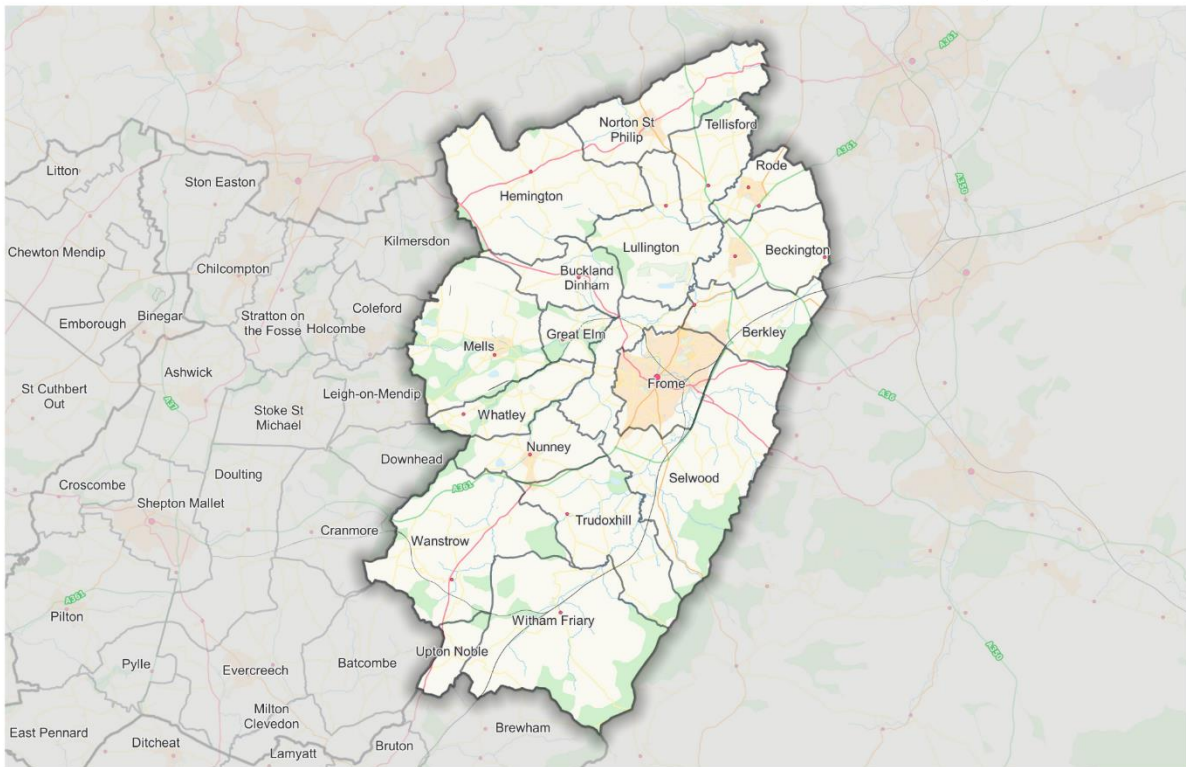
There is a new planning committee for each part of the council - Mendip's Planning Board is replaced with a Planning East Committee. Minutes and agendas of the previous Councils' committees are being uploaded and not on the new website yet – please let me know if you need anything specific. Some direct links to services and queries are on my website at <https://adamboyden.mycouncillor.org.uk/2023/04/11/new-era-at-somerset-council/#page-content>

Somerset Council has started a **weekly email newsletter** you can sign up to, so please see here to be even more informed – <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/newsroom/>

I will sit on the Planning Committee for East, and will Vice-Chair the Climate & Place Scrutiny Committee (assisting Martin Dimery as Chair). The calendar of meetings is here <https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>

Local Community Networks:

The 18 Local Community Networks intend to be the 'voice' of local communities, to engage and improve outcomes for residents through strong connections between Somerset Council, parish and town councils, communities, businesses and partners, such as in health, police, education, and the voluntary sector. The LCNs are being set up, with first meetings being organised in June. Somerset Councillors had a briefing from Kate Hellard yesterday. A further briefing on the new Frome LCN is due in the next few weeks, to build on the good work of the Frome pilot, including to help identify 'hot topics' and priorities, and core stakeholder members. One named rep from each parish will be requested. See <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/> for more, including on the three pilot LCNs – the Frome area, South East Somerset, and Exmoor.



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23/03/2023

Packsaddle fields:

A few weeks ago, LiveWest launched a pre-application consultation on draft proposals to develop the fields off Packsaddle Way and Leys Lane for 74 new homes, a residential facility for disabled children and some retained open space, at <https://livewestpacksaddle.co.uk/>. I understand from the People for Packsaddle local group that at least 136 residents responded to LiveWest to object in principle to the development of the green space, now a designated Asset of Community Value. LiveWest will be writing up the responses to the consultation and undertaking further ecological surveys this Spring, and are likely to submit a planning application later in the year. PFP have been in touch with Somerset Councillors, and I have asked for a review. Councillors are also to have a briefing from Somerset Council.

Acacia Drive trees:

I have objected to the application by an insurance company to fell the two large old oak trees at the childrens play park at Acacia Drive, due to alleged impacts on the house. Both trees are legally protected by a Tree Preservation Order, and one is identified as a Veteran tree which is 'irreplaceable habitat' under the National Planning Policy Framework. Please [see here](#) for the application documents (ref 2023/0441/TPO) and comments. The Somerset Council Tree Officer will decide the application. There are 32 public objections so far, including from FTC after discussion at your Planning Committee on 30th March, which informed my objection. I hope to set up a meeting with the residents and officers shortly.

Flies around Frome sewage works:

Last year the fly nuisance suffered for years by residents around Wessex Water's Frome sewage works at Welshmill was substantially reduced by the installation of netting (as a trial) over the sewage filter beds, after concerted action by residents and councillors. The netting trial will be reported in June, when another meeting will be held with Wessex Water (which I

will invite residents to). Since the autumn I have heard few complaints (Wessex Water have received none). However, yesterday I was alerted to a video from a resident showing large swarms of flies at the tall conifer trees at the northern end of the works, the largest swarm seen this year. I alerted Somerset Council, Wessex Water, and residents in the area, and some have reported flies in their homes. I have advised residents that if the types of flies breeding at the work enter their property, they need to make a complaint, to:

- Wessex Water's complaints line 0345 600 4 6000 (Monday – Friday 8am-6pm) or at <https://www.wessexwater.co.uk/help-and-advice/customer-commitments/enquiries-and-complaints>
- Somerset Council – <https://mdc.somerset.gov.uk/make-an-environmental-complaint>

I am also collating responses and will make a report to both Wessex and the Council. We need to keep of this to not let the nuisance build up again, as people should not have to put up with it. See <https://adamboyden.mycouncillor.org.uk/2023/04/17/flies-around-frome/#page-content>

Parks and Recreation:

I await a date from Somerset Council for the works to improve the two playgrounds in Stonebridge (Hawksworth Close and Blackbird Way) to begin. I look forward to meeting Rob Holden on the Old Showfield to discuss the refresh project in the next few weeks.

Environment Scrutiny:

The last Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting of Somerset County Council on 29th March had a presentation on the **Tree Strategy** for Somerset and an update on the climate work (which will be fully reported to the new Climate & Place Scrutiny Committee in May. Let me know if you need the reports as they are not online yet.

Glastonbury Festival planning permission:

At the final Mendip District Council Planning Board on 29th March, we listened to residents' concerns (21 people had objected), but granted permanent planning permission for the Glastonbury Festival (I seconded the motion to approve, due to the wider economic and cultural benefits and the joy the festival brings to millions). It was quite a big way to go out. The first meeting of the new Somerset Council Planning East Committee is on Tuesday 2nd May at 2pm, in the same place.

Farleigh inland bathing water application:

Farleigh & District Swimming Club is planning to apply to the Government to designate their stretch of the River Frome at Farleigh Hungerford as an official Bathing Water. Designated bathing waters are monitored by the Environment Agency for bacteria during the bathing season (May to September), and information on water quality is publicised. Wessex Water undertake informal bacteriological monitoring at Farleigh Hungerford as part of an investigation of water quality at the Warleigh Weir downstream, but designation of the site would recognise that the river is legitimately used for swimming here, and could help put pressure on water companies and the Environment Agency to reduce pollution. Farleigh & District Swimming Club was founded in 1933, has parking, toilets and changing facilities, and around 5000 members. Please see the club's website or email farleighclub@gmail.com to find out more or get involved. This was discussed at Norton St Philip Parish Council's meeting last week, and I will give an update after a councillors' briefing with the club.

20 mph speed limits:

At a Somerset Councillors briefing on 20 mph speed limits on 5th April it was stated that Somerset Council will be inviting parish councils to identify roads where the community would benefit from reducing speed limits to 20mph, assuming the parish council would take on the costs of the process. This could tie in with the Frome LCWIP.

Ambitious Education Strategy for Somerset:

Ambitious plans to transform education and drive improvements in Somerset schools have been unveiled, following reports that Somerset is in the top ten Local Authorities nationally for the proportion of inadequate schools, and that more support is needed from Somerset (County) Council. Somerset's schools and the Council's education professionals have committed to tackle challenges, support each other and deliver much needed improvements.

Council invests in stronger support for domestic abuse victims:

A new approach to domestic abuse services in Somerset aims to break the cycle of abuse, reduce repeat offending and offer stronger support for victims and families. The Council's Somerset Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (SIDAS) will provide additional investment in safe accommodation, and will offer a more holistic type of support, with interventions for anybody whose life is impacted by domestic abuse. From the first week in May, the support hub in Yeovil will be open from 5pm to 8pm for one-to-one support. Local in-person support will be available from SIDAS staff at Frome Library every third Thursday of the month from 10am to 1pm.

New bus services and more passengers across Somerset as 'Bus It' £2 single fare is extended:

Bus users in Somerset can continue to travel on most routes in the county and beyond for just £2 until July, following an extension to the Government-funded national initiative. The £2 single fare is available from all participating operators and on most bus routes in and across Somerset. Somerset Council and the Somerset Bus Partnership launched the 'Bus It' campaign to encourage more people to use bus services, as some routes are under threat due to lack of use. It has just been announced that passenger numbers have indeed increased by around 14% across the county. First Bus has also recently introduced the D2X, an express bus between Frome and Bath, as well as new services that run later into the evenings.

Covid-19 Spring Booster vaccination begins across Somerset:

The NHS in Somerset will begin the next phase of Covid-19 vaccinations from 17th April with its Spring programme, geared to protect the most vulnerable residents – people aged 75 and over or those aged 5-74 with weakened immune systems. Adults in an older persons care home have already been receiving the vaccination since early April. Please see <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/covid-19-spring-booster-vaccination-begins-across-somerset/>.

National No Smoking Day: new app to help quitting smoking:

Smoking is linked to health problems such as heart disease, cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, increases the likelihood of developing dementia, and can increase stress, anxiety and depression. The Smokefreelife Somerset service has launched a free interactive smartphone app – My Quit Route, a personalised, non-judgmental programme to help people stop smoking. It is easy to sign up – call 01823 356222 or go online at www.healthysomerset.co.uk/smokefree/support-me.

Golden Hello for childminders in Somerset:

Somerset Council is offering a “Golden Hello” grant worth £250 to people who would like to be a childminder, which can be used to help with training and set up costs – see

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/250-golden-hello-for-new-childminders-in-somerset/>.

There is a lot more going on of course. Do let me know if there is anything I can help with or if you have any queries. Links to all the above for more details are on my website, largely in the April newsletter - <https://adamboyden.mycouncillor.org.uk/2023/04/14/april-news/#page-content>.

Best wishes,

Adam Boyden

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