

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

BRIEFING SHEET from the desk of Cllr David Fothergill FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

FEBRUARY 2023

Somerset County Council Finances: Somerset County Council continue to show a projected overspend of £21m, however the decision was taken at the December Executive not to formally report the recent Month 8. figures. The Revenue and Capital budgets for the new Somerset Council will be proposed and debated at a Full Council meeting on the 22nd February 2023.

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. Tier 3 (Service Director level) appointments are taking place during mid-March and it is hoped to have the majority in place before vesting day on April 1st. Unfortunately, these appointments were due in late summer and the lengthy delay has created a significant risk to the programme delivery.

Dunball Roundabout (J23): The first phase of a major project to improve the busy Dunball roundabout linking Bridgwater and Junction 23 of the M5 has just begun. Preparation work was scheduled to commence at the end of January under traffic management and will include vegetation and some tree removal. Work is expected to commence in the summer on construction. The plan will see enhanced pedestrian and cycling access as part of improved cycling and walking links into Bridgwater. This new safe route for cyclists and pedestrians, will eventually stretch from the Gravity site at Puriton to Bridgwater town centre via Dunball. As well as a contribution from the Government's Levelling Up fund, the scheme has been funded jointly by Sedgemoor District Council, Bridgwater Town Deal, the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and National Highways.

Major roadworks in Bridgwater: Work to renew traffic lights and crossings will see major upgrades to traffic signals at the Broadway/St John's Street junction as well as the zebra crossings on Broadway near Blake Place being replaced with new puffin crossings. The work at the Broadway junction with St John's Street also includes a new parallel crossing, allowing cyclists to get across this busy junction in one movement, alongside an improved pedestrian crossing. Work, which commenced on 15 January, is expected to conclude in the summer.

New primary school: planning permission has been granted for the new primary school at the Orchard Grove (Comeytrowe) development in Taunton. The £11.3m

school will serve the new development, with capacity for 420 pupils and 52 nursery places, and room to expand to accommodate an additional 210 children. The super-energy-efficient Passivhaus design of the school and added solar panels will ensure the building is Net Zero. In addition to environmental benefits, this will also lower the school's running costs. The school building will open in September 2024

Greener roads maintenance trials: Funding to support projects focused on a greener approach to highways maintenance and construction has been awarded. The £5m initiative sees Somerset County Council joining forces with Cornwall Council, Hampshire County Council and Devon County Council to deliver innovative ideas to decarbonise how the UK builds and maintains its highways network. The councils will support each other, sharing learning, practice and insights and will be supported by academic teams, including Exeter University.

Evening bus services: As part of Government-funded Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which aims to increase bus patronage by introducing a number of important initiatives evening bus services on some key routes in Somerset begin running from the beginning of February. The evening bus routes are:

- 1E – Taunton to Priorswood/Musgrove Park/Silk Mills Park and Ride
- 21 – Taunton to Bridgwater
- 22 – Taunton to Wellington
- 28 – Taunton to Minehead
- 30 – Taunton to Chard

My Time to Care: Somerset County Council has joined forces with the NHS and Registered Care Providers Association for the new 'My Time to Care' campaign, which aims to empower carers, and show how working in social care in Somerset is a respected, meaningful, and fun career choice. The recruitment campaign is being promoted on social media, in the local media, and with advertising across Somerset. A recruitment event is also set to take place at Somerset County Cricket Club on Tuesday, February 7th 2023

Business mentors scheme: Executive and senior management level business leaders, successful entrepreneurs and business consultants, who understand the challenges associated with running and growing a business and the value of impartial advice, are being encouraged to register and train as Business Mentors. Those trained and funded under the Somerset Business Mentoring Programme will need to deliver 12 hours of mentoring support in Somerset to businesses, social enterprises and/or charities. They will be identified on the SCC Business Mentoring website. For anyone interested in becoming a Somerset Business Mentor, more information is available at www.somerset.gov.uk/business-mentoring . Applicants will then be contacted for an introductory chat and an invitation to meet with the Programme Managers. References will be required.