

Somerset Councillors' report to Mendip Hills Parish' May 2024

Somerset Council has been in existence in its current form for just over a year. To mark this, the administration has prepared a list of "first year achievements". This is a very informative list, which highlights the fact that whilst the financial situation has dominated much of the work over the past few months, there have been other significant achievements. That document is submitted alongside this report.

Annual General Meeting

At the second Annual General Meeting of Somerset Council, Cllr Mike Best (Crewkerne) and Cllr Lee Baker (Taunton North) were elected as Chair and Vice Chair of the Council respectively.

Cllr Bill Revans remains leader of the Council and the rest of the Executive remains unchanged.

Minor changes have been made to committee appointments across the council. Following the resignation of Cllr Alex Wiltshire (Liberal Democrat), Cllr Rob Reed (Liberal Democrat) was elected in a by-election to represent Mendip South. Cllr Reed takes up Cllr Wiltshire seat on the Area East planning committee – Cllr Nick Cottle and Edric Hobbs remain as Chair and Vice Chair respectively.

Transformation

The Council's voluntary redundancy program – part of a suite of interventions intended to reduce the Council's wage bill by £40m has seen 201 applications for voluntary redundancy granted (out of 372). These redundancies should reduce the budget by £8.204m in 2025/6 – leaving £27.158m yet to be found.

The Council is currently undertaking an internal consultation on the tier 2-3 (Executive Director and Service Director) restructuring – this envisages a reduction from seven to four Executive Directors and reducing the number of Service Directors from 22 to 15. Consultations on the restructuring of the Council below this level will start in June/July. It is intended that this restructuring will reduce the number of tiers within Somerset Council to six, from Chief Executive (tier 1) to front-line staff (tier 6).

It is important to note that voluntary and compulsory redundancies are not the only areas of search for this £40m saving – deleting vacant posts and reducing spend on agency staff are also key areas where savings are envisaged.

Further work continues to drive efficiencies within the organisation via both innovation and devolution/partnership working,

Glastonbury Road Wells roadworks

Work by Wales and West Utilities to replace the gas pipes across disruptive. It had been planned that the next phase of this work would involve turning the section of Glastonbury Road immediately off the Tinknell's roundabout one way (heading in to Wells only) from 28th May – 16th June. Following serious concerns about the impact of this approach (not least given its overlap with exam season) this work has been postponed. We will be meeting with Somerset Council officers next week to seek greater clarity on the rationale for undertaking this work in this way and the possible alternatives and/or mitigations.

Roadworks under temporary traffic lights

Frustratingly, work continues to need to be done under temporary traffic lights in a number of areas around Wells. Whenever this is happening the permit number for the work and the emergency contact number must be clearly displayed (in case anything goes wrong, e.g. the lights fail). If the lights do fail please report them via the emergency phone number displayed on the site. Please also report these incidents to us. Please also report any incidents where the correct information is not displayed (especially live incidents).

Tony Robbins and Edric Hobbs

3rd June 2024