

Councillors report August 2020 Jenny Kenton Blackdown and Tatworth

Like yourselves we are getting more used to using zoom technology for meetings and most District Council meetings are now up and running, although I seem to spend a lot of my time in the spare bedroom! We have several working groups and all committees now working this way and even held a full Council with 66 members this month to deal with important items that could not be postponed any longer. We have adopted some rules regarding using zoom which mean meetings are more structured and easier for the Chairperson to preside over, all our meetings are available to the public and are streamed live as well as being stored on YouTube. Looking forward to life after Coronavirus it would seem that we may keep this platform for some meetings and workshops as the savings in staff and Councillors travelling time and costs is significant.

The full Council meeting rejected the County Councils proposal for a new one unitary authority but this was not unanimous, all members however agreed that changes must be made and this may result in either one or two unitary authorities over the whole of Somerset. If agreed by the Government the County proposal will mean that an election for new members will take place in 2022 and both County and District Councils will be dissolved in favour of this new body. Obvious improvements will be in either case the requirement for the public to be aware of which Council is going to deal with your problem and the need for several Councillors to represent you, we do not know how they will be allocated but there will be 100 Councillors for the whole of Somerset so it is very likely that Chard and the surrounding areas will have 3 Councillors instead of its current 7. We are waiting for the District Councils to come up with an alternative proposal and to see if it will be considered by national Government. Watch this space!

Nationally the Government is trying to cut bureaucracy in planning to get Britain building. South Somerset is also trying to reduce its red tape to improve and quicken the planning process, as I have said before, both Martin and I are involved in this process which seems to be many an afternoon spent in my spare bedroom! Currently we are trying to reduce officer time in report writing for non contentious applications.

I am also on the standards board for SSDC and this week we agreed to recommend to full Council that the District Council adopt another layer of process to aid in relations between officers and members with a kind of reconciliation which might prevent as many cases going to the monitoring officer when complaints are made about members and officers. It was thought that if Council agree to adopt this we may offer the wording to local Town and parish Councils to consider adding to their code of conduct in the future if they wished.