



Somerset Liberal Democrats Tatworth & Forton August 2022

Somerset County Council backs new Cost-of-Living Crisis Appeal

Somerset County Council has welcomed the launch of Somerset Community Foundation's Somerset Cost-of-Living Crisis Appeal.

The Council has contributed an initial £50,000 donation to support the launch of the appeal. The Cost-of-Living Crisis Appeal is an urgent call for donations which will be used to help fund local charities supporting local people living in poverty through the cost-of-living crisis.



Donations will fund crucial local work such as debt advice organisations, food banks, mental health support, help for people with disabilities or older people, and homelessness organisations.

To donate to the Somerset Cost-of-Living Crisis Appeal today visit:

www.somersetcf.org.uk/costofliving or call 01749 344949.

When the fund is open, any community group or charitable organisation wishing to apply for a grant should visit the SCF website where they can find guidance on how to make an application:

www.somersetcf.org.uk/apply.

For more details about the fund, visit: <https://www.somersetcf.org.uk/somerset-cost-of-living-crisis-appeal-launched>.

Council Tax Support Scheme Consultation



A consultation on council tax support for the new unitary Somerset Council has launched. This is the first major consultation for the new Somerset Council and it proposes that the lowest income households across Somerset get 100% council tax relief.

Somerset's four district councils currently offer varying levels of council tax support. The proposed changes would harmonise support for working-age people on low incomes across the county and come

into effect on 1 April 2023, with the creation of the new Council.

For more information: <https://somersetnewsroom.com/2022/07/25/consultation-on-council-tax-support-scheme-launched/>

Council Finance Update

Somerset County Council, like many councils, is experiencing significant financial challenges in the current year. Inflationary factors, as we are all experiencing in our home lives, affect a large Council on a large scale. Energy costs, travel costs, increases in construction materials have all added to our costs and in turn that has affected the pay award for this year. SCC is part of a national negotiation and the latest employers' offer, equivalent to 5.5% increase, has not been accepted.



Other factors are having an adverse effect on Adults and Children's services, with increases in external placements post-Covid and the same inflationary factors impacting on the companies and organisations that provide residential placements. They are also seeing greater challenges in providing the right level of staffing, with a very competitive labour market throughout the country. The Council's Senior Leadership Team is already working on plans to reduce the projected overspend, and some areas of the Council are now projecting underspends. Of course, this financial year's projections have an impact on the first-year budget of the new Somerset Council. Savings will be made when the five councils come together as one Unitary Council but those savings won't be in place on day one, so it is essential that different ways of working and other plans are put in place early in the autumn. The Executive will continue to receive monthly budget monitoring reports as well as the ongoing reporting on Local Government Reorganisation.

Local Community Networks



A consultation regarding the development of the much-anticipated Local Community Networks (LCNs) is soon set to launch. Somerset Council will cover a very large geographical area and so needs local committees of the council where voices can be heard, partners brought together, and decisions taken with the benefit of local knowledge and experience.

Throughout the summer officers of County and District Councils have been working on options for the following aspects of LCNs:

Function – the roles and responsibilities of LCNs in the first and subsequent years of Somerset Council.

Form – options for the boundaries of the LCNs, using existing democratic boundaries and community infrastructure.

Name – does Local Community Network describe the form and function of the committees?

Finance – as inflation impacts on all council budgets, LCNs must be affordable in the first year yet able to develop in future years as savings are realised from the move to one council.

Governance – as Committees of Somerset Council, the LCNs will have a formal role and be supported by Democratic Services at the Council.

The consultation will be launched on 1st September and run to mid-October, and will seek the views of parish, town & city councils, partner organisations and individuals on the function, form and name for LCNs. A comprehensive communications strategy is currently being drawn up ready for the launch of the online consultation. The responses will form an important part of the recommendations for the Somerset County Council Executive and Full Council.