



**Somerset Liberal Democrats
Chard South
January 2023**

Somerset Council Budget

Budget setting work has been ongoing since July 2022 when the Executive agreed Term Financial Strategy & Plan. The proposed balanced budget will be considered for the first time at Executive on Wednesday 18th January.



It is a requirement for the budget to be balanced with Local Authorities unable to approve a deficit budget. The administration has concentrated on balancing the protection of services previously delivered by District Councils and the greater need for social care services in both Adults and Children's, due to the lasting effects of Covid-19.

Savings from the move from five to one Council are critical at this time, and are acknowledged as both creating more work and providing a significant part of the solution to the current financial challenge.

Full Council on 22nd Feb will approve the Revenue Budget for 23/24, the Capital Programme and the Treasury Management Strategy for the new Council

'Bus It' for £2 on single bus journeys across Somerset



Bus users in Somerset will be able to travel on most routes in the county for just £2 from January.

The major fare cut is part of an initiative funded by the Government aimed at boosting bus use while helping passengers to save money as the cost of living crisis continues to bite, fuelled in part by high petrol and diesel prices.

The £2 single fare is available from all participating operators from 1 January to 31 March. The initiative will apply to the majority of routes in Somerset. You can check here <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/busit> to see find out more about the scheme.

Somerset County Council and the Somerset Bus Partnership have launched the 'Bus It' campaign to encourage more people to use bus services at a time when many routes are under threat due to lack of use. It's hoped the new £2 fare will provide a major boost to patronage and support these aims.

Local Community Networks

The latest papers relating to the proposed Local Community Network structure (including geography) are set to be published ahead of the Executive meeting on Wednesday 18th January.

The proposals take into consideration the hundreds of responses received from the formal consultation exercise undertaken last year and will form the starting point for the networks.



New branding for Somerset Council confirmed



The new brand, featuring a version of the Somerset Dragon from the county's coat of arms, has been designed by an in-house team at the council and was developed after testing with staff and residents.

Council services will be badged by a white dragon's head placed in a teal five-sided shape, representing the five councils that will be replaced by the new council.

As well as keeping costs down by designing the branding with an in-house team made up of designers from Sedgemoor and South Somerset District Councils, working with colleagues from Somerset County Council, the paper approved by Executive also proposes that the new council should avoid a branding "Big Bang", rolling out the new brand over time and accepting that branding from the existing councils will continue to be seen around the county for some years to come.

The design team has gone to great lengths to make the new brand clear and accessible, with the key colour supporting the highest level of accessibility and using a new typeface, Atkinson Hyperlegible, a font designed with the Braille Institute in the United States.

The new branding will first appear where the council has a legal responsibility to identify itself as providers of services, from council tax statements to parking signs. It will also provide brand new services such as Somerset's Council's single new website.

As well as the dragon's head, the design team has included topographical outlines of 12 Somerset landmarks, from Glastonbury Tor to Knowle Hill, to link the council's publications to the county it serves. The new council plans to add other landmarks over coming years in response to suggestions from residents.

Peer Review

A Local Government Association light touch Peer Review was undertaken in December by senior Officers and Members from other Councils including Unitary councils.

The report will be considered by the Executive on Wednesday 18th Jan, it is helpful in giving reassurance where work is progressing well, and shining a light where additional focus and resources are needed. The feedback of the work undertaken to date and planned ahead of Vesting Day was positive.