

1. Unitary proposals

I have now received some clarification of the process of working towards a Unitary council, for which initial elections to shadow councillor roles will be held in May 2021 (these shadow roles to become full unitary council roles in April 2022).

I will be attending (on Teams) the first meeting of the new Joint Committee regarding the Unitary Council on Friday (5th November) in Shepton Mallet. In this meeting the Terms of Reference for the new committee will be agreed, together with proposals for an implementation plan, programme governance and implementation plan budget.

The three committees that will steer progress on the move to a Unitary Council will operate as follows:

The LGR Joint Committee

The Joint Committee is designed to steer the move to a new single council and oversee the implementation plan and development of the new unitary council's constitution and budget. The JC has nine members, the Leaders of the district and county councils and four further members of the County Council cabinet.

The LGR Advisory Board

The Advisory Board is, as its name suggests, a less formal public meeting and is intended to provide a route for public sector partners, members of the public and other interested parties to contribute to the process and ideas of creating the new council.

Meetings will be held monthly at locations around the county. The next meeting is on 25 November in Donyatt Village Hall, Ilminster. One of its first tasks is to explore the design of Local Community Networks (LCNs), to look at potential pilot schemes and evaluate the success of pilot schemes. LCNs will be established in every area in Somerset (post vesting day) – 15 to 20 in all.

The Board's role is advisory, but its proposals, ideas and recommendations will feed into the unitary programme and the decision-making Joint Committee. It is hoped that a wholly inclusive meeting will encourage fresh thinking and innovative contributions from public, partners and members.

Membership is eight Elected Members (County and District with SCC's Cabinet Member for LGR chairing the meetings), and reps from Somerset Association of Local Councils, Somerset Society of Local Council Clerks, health, police, education and voluntary/community sector (Spark Somerset). The Board will develop links to the Somerset Youth Parliament.

The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee

Proposals for a LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee are being developed to be considered at each Council's Full Council meeting in either November/December or February 2022. It will work in the manner of scrutiny committees elsewhere in local government, operating as a critical

friend and providing oversight and review of policy development ahead of decision making by the LGR JC, and ensuring that decision making processes are robust and transparent.

The Programme Board is in the process of establishing a standalone website. Notifications of all meetings and the terms of reference will be published on this site once it is approved and live.

2. Tree-planting

A Tree Vision and Implementation Plan, which has been worked on cross-party, was considered at Scrutiny. MDC's former Climate Resilience Officer, Hayley Warrens (who has now left and been replaced), suggested a series of measures and actions required to achieve the reduction of Carbon Emissions in a paper approved by Cabinet in June 2021. Many of the actions are only possible with help from central government. However they include the following which Mendip could facilitate:

(a) 10% increase over and above existing tree coverage by 2023, just 2 years away; unfortunately, the level of tree cover in Somerset is woefully low. The national average is 13% cover (compared to an EU average of 35%) and within Somerset our cover is just 6%;

and/or

(b) 3% increase in forest coverage as measured by acreage in total land area.

To date MDC has planted around 600 trees since May 2019, well below aspirations, partly due to the pandemic and furlough/ redeployment of staff.

Note that High level Mapping of tree cover at a local scale is already publicly available - see <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d8c253ab17e1412586d9774d1a09fa07> . Using this tool I note that Glastonbury St Mary's Ward has 7.3% tree cover.

In addition, a programme of replacement of ash trees, many of which will be felled due to ash die-back, will have to be implemented. In some cases Mendip woods will lose 90% of their trees in this way.

Voluntary organisations and charities are doing an excellent job to hasten progress in Somerset; Reimagining the Levels have planted over 20,000 trees and shrubs (for hedging, etc) last year and welcome new volunteers for the new planting season this autumn/winter : <http://reimaginingthelevels.org.uk/>

3. Clarks Westway Distribution Centre strike

Warehouse workers at the Westway Distribution Centre have been on strike since 4th October over fire and re-hire, where many of the conditions and benefits of their employment contract are reduced, including reducing their pay from £11.16 to £9.50 per hour. Many countries in Europe do not allow this practice and in Spain and Ireland it is illegal. I have been helping to provide support for the striking workers, some of whom of course live in Glastonbury. From a Green perspective it is very simple; people before profits. It seems very unfair that some of the lowest paid employees are being targeted in this way, where other better paid employees in the company are not having their wages/salary reduced,