

**District Councillor's report to WFPC 09/11/2021**

**From**

**Michael Gay Postlebury District Councillor**

## Unitary

Suggested deadlines have passed by and there is now a draft response from the Ministry. The headlines in the local press, states that there will be 110 councillors, two for each existing division assuming there is an election in May 2022, however there is a chance that a further delay will be requested to allow the Boundary Commission time to review the wards.. If the 110 approach is approved by Parliament, this will be an improvement on the Ministry's first preference, and in line with the representations made by the Green Group.

I have been told that the Somerset MP's are lobbying hard for another year's delay to County (Unitary) elections, and if that happens, I assume that would apply to Parish Elections too.

In the interim, transition teams have been formed at every Council to work out how to move from District to Unitary. This work is being funded from the local Councils, not by Government, and its Mendip's current view that they will have to sell an asset to pay for it. I have some reservations about how this is being done, as there seems to be little control over some representations being made, and have made my feelings known to Mendip's Chief Executive.

I am including a copy of an email sent by Carlton Brand outlining some of this activity. You will be aware that locally point Frome TC have been active in trying to form a Local Community Network to include parishes in their locality. They are seeking to conduct a pilot study on how such a group might affect Families and Children undertakings within the new authority, I have attended these meetings both as a Wanstrow Parish Councillor and District Councillor

My representations have consistently been that parishes must retain all existing rights and be able to choose their own path through these mechanisms. Absorbing District reserves and selling off assets will only put off the debts for so long, and unless central funds are allocated from the increased national insurance levy, rising social care costs alone will force cuts or severe financial difficulty for the Unitary. I continue to maintain that the cost of change will increase, the savings targets will not be met, and I urge all parishes not to accept further responsibilities unless guaranteed long-term funding is included.

I attended the first meeting of the Joint Council Transition Board last Friday and asked David Fothergill if he would accept special responsibility for delivering the programme on cost and get all the savings predicted. You may rest assured that I will publicly point out his personal responsibility to him should it be suggested that costs might go up or savings be lost

If any Councillor or Resident wants further information, I will be happy to receive their email or call.

## COVID and Mendip

You will be aware that case numbers are very high, and all the local hospitals are under great pressure again. I have asked the Chief Executive to allow for a renewed requirement for help from Government in his staff planning. I am also expecting a report on how many of Mendip's top officers are going to be working on Unitary transition rather than Mendip's work, and how that is going to be back-filled.

### Planning, Water extraction, Quarry

The Bindon lane application remains unresolved awaiting issues such as access.

I have raised a number of enquiries with the Environment Agency on the matter of water extraction and received acknowledgement but they are very short-staffed so responses may take time. Once I have them, I will send them on for your interest and would be pleased to add any supplementary questions people have after reading them.

For those interested in the Westdown quarry application, the Ecological report has been re-written and has to go out to consultation again. With the December regulation board cancelled, this is not now likely to be heard until January or February.

### Fly tipping

This continues to be an issue in the District. Police have been working with SWP and others to conduct stop and searches of vans and lorries, and extra action is being taken to trace dumped goods to their source. It remains very important that residents only use licensed waste contractors and (if building work is being done) ask the builder how they are disposing of waste.

### Allotments

Wanstrow PC have a couple of allotments available at their popular site in Studley lane, and its been agreed to offer them to offer them to parishioners of nearby parishes, so please contact me if anyone from Witham is interested.

Kind regards  
Michael Gay

Letter from Carlton Brand  
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 terms of reference were agreed at a meeting last Friday)*

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.

Dr Carlton Brand  
LGR Programme Director

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